Field-Marshal
SIR GEORGE WHITE

O.M. V.C. G.C.B. G.C.S.I.
G.C.M.G. G.C.I.E.
D.C.L. LL.D.



SIR MORTIMER DURAND

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The Life of Field-Marshal
Sir George White, V.C.



Jno Most affectionately
Geo S White

The Life of Field-Marshal

Sir George White, V.C.

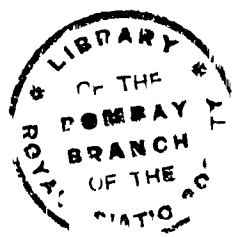
G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., G.C.I.E.,
O.M., D.C.L., LL.D.

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BY

SIR MORTIMER DURAND

VOLUME II.



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

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The Life of
Field-Marshal Sir George White.

CHAPTER I.

QUARTERMASTER-GENERAL AT THE HORSE GUARDS.

1898-1899.

WHITE landed in England in the end of April 1898, after a tedious voyage. His broken leg had been kept in plaster of Paris all the way, and though he was able to totter about a little on crutches for exercise, he had to be carried on deck and below. The discomfort and confinement worried him, and he was not in very good spirits when he arrived.

Perhaps the belief that his active career as a soldier was now over had something to do with his depression. While he was serving in India, from 1854 to 1898, on and off, though he had passed through some disheartening times, he had also had his fill of fighting and excitement and important work. And

he had come back covered with honours and decorations. Now he was to exchange the large open life of India for a house in London, which he had always detested, and the command of three hundred thousand men for an office chair. He knew soldiers and their needs, as he said, having been a regimental officer most of his life, and he took up his new work without serious doubts as to his capacity to do it; but, he told a friend, "it is not congenial work to me, or what I am well up in." Being for the time a cripple did not make the prospect more attractive.

The various officers of the War Office Staff in England have so often had their work altered and redistributed, that it is by no means easy to say what each of them had to do in 1898. But, so far as I can judge from the Report of the Commission on the War in South Africa, the position was as follows:—

The Secretary of State for War, at that time the Marquess of Lansdowne, had under him five principal officers charged with the administration of the Departments of the Army. These were—

The Commander-in-Chief.

The Adjutant-General.

The Quartermaster-General.

The Inspector-General of Fortifications.

The Inspector-General of Ordnance.

And as to the Quartermaster-General it was laid down:—

> The Quartermaster-General shall be charged with supplying the Army with food, forage, fuel and light, and quarters, with land and water transport, and with remounts; with the movement of troops, and with the distribution of their

stores and equipment; with administering the Army Service Corps, the Pay Department, and the establishments employed on the above Services; and with dealing with the sanitary questions relating to the Army. He shall submit proposals for the annual Estimates for the above Services, and shall advise the Secretary of State on all questions connected with the duties of his Department. He shall make such inspections as shall be necessary to secure the efficiency of the Services under his control.

These are no doubt varied duties, but they are very different from the duties of the Quartermaster-General of old days, who had in his hands practically all the more active work of the Staff, the less active work going to the Adjutant-General. By the new arrangement the Quartermaster-General's Department had in fact been practically abolished, and his work parcelled out among various other officials, it is said with no good results. Lord Roberts indeed complained that the results had been most pernicious.

Then, although the Commander-in-Chief was charged *inter alia* with "the general supervision of the Military Departments of the War Office," yet it was the duty of the Quartermaster-General to advise the Secretary of State direct. He was in fact an officer of the War Office, not an officer of the Commander-in-Chief's Staff. As White himself put it: "There is too great independence in the several branches of the War Office, and the soldiers are not sufficiently controllers of military action, and are not very united or strong."

Among the lessons taught by the Boer War, so soon to follow, was the lesson that there was need

for many changes in the organisation of the War Office, and many changes were made. But, as constituted in 1898, it was not a place where White could feel himself altogether in his element; and in spite of his strong personal liking for, and belief in, Lord Lansdowne, he was not entirely happy.

The first thing to be done after taking charge was to have the broken leg as far as possible put right. It was in a bad way. In a speech to some Irish doctors, delivered, I believe, in 1899, but, like most of White's written speeches, bearing no date, the following passage occurs:—

> If I am not boring you very much I should like to make a short personal acknowledgment. . . .
>
> At the end of April last I landed in England with a leg so broken up that a very high authority described it, I believe, as "a bag of bones"—no less an authority than Mr Watson Cheyne. Well, the leg went through queer experiences. It was laid open and the fragments of the bone were screwed together with screws that long. But, gentlemen, that leg had played an important part in my previous life, when I was president of the Army Temperance Association in India, and thought there was something inconsistent with its antecedents in being constantly screwed, and resented it. The bag of bones was consequently opened up again and the screws removed, and yet I can sincerely say that I had no pain. The fact, gentlemen, that I can get on my legs and address you to-night . . . is due to the skill of your profession, and I think I ought to express gratitude to your profession for such a leg-asy.

This is of course wholly unpardonable, even in an Irishman speaking to Irishmen, but the extract shows how severe the injury had been.

Towards the end of October 1898 White writes to a friend, Miss Sellar: "I can now walk short distances at my own pace, which is a slow one. . . . I shall always have a limp, but I hope to have a useful leg." The screws were apparently of steel silvered over, which drove White to write that he had become a bimetallist. The end of it all was that the leg became serviceable enough. He did limp slightly, but he was able a few years later to take again the long mountain walks in which he delighted.

It seems unnecessary to examine in any detail the work done by White while he was Quartermaster-General. Though heavy enough, it was to a large extent routine work, and he made no pretence of enjoying it. Indeed it is doubtful which he disliked more, his office work or the round of society which his presence in London imposed upon him. The latter he managed to avoid in some measure by taking judicious advantage of his crippled leg. The office work he had to do conscientiously, and with it a certain quantity of connected work in the way of inspections, speeches at temperance meetings, and the like. Why he disliked so much the round of London society is not easy to say. He was very far from being an inhospitable man, nor was he in any way awkward or embarrassed among his fellow-creatures. But he resented having to spend his time at lunches and dinners among a number of people who, though collectively powerful, were not, as a rule, individually congenial to him; and if he could help it he would not do so. He remained at home as much as possible.

Dull as this period of White's life seems to have been, there was one thing about it which could not fail to give it continual interest—namely, the very precarious condition of our relations with the Boer Republics of South Africa. In 1898 it had become clear that hostilities between the Republics and Great Britain were, to say the least of it, not improbable; and the War Office was well aware of the fact. Political considerations made it difficult to complete the preparations necessary for such an eventuality, but the matter was constantly under discussion. By the summer of 1899 matters had very nearly come to a head, and there seemed to be scant hope of avoiding war.

Nevertheless other matters had to go on as usual, and on the 12th of July Lord Wolseley, who was then Commander-in-Chief, offered White the Governorship of Gibraltar. This appointment, carrying higher pay, and involving the actual command of troops, suited White much better than a London office, and he at once accepted it. Gibraltar was not, however, to be vacant immediately, and as it happened, much water was to run under the bridge before he took charge.

On the 6th of September White was warned by Lord Wolseley that matters were in a very critical state in South Africa, and that he "must be prepared to start almost immediately for Natal." It had then been settled that in case of war an attempt should be made to hold both Natal and Cape Colony against invasion, but without attacking the Boers; and that

meanwhile an Army Corps, with a division of cavalry and some subsidiary troops, some 48,000 men in all, should be got together in England. This force, which was eventually to invade the Republics, was to be commanded by Sir Redvers Buller. White's *rôle*, pending the arrival of the Army Corps, was to be purely defensive. He was simply to hold and protect Natal.

Before finally appointing White to the Natal command Lord Wolseley expressed some doubt whether White's broken leg would not affect his fitness for service in the field. His answer was to the point. "My leg," he said, "is good enough for anything except running away." This settled the matter.

To enable White to protect Natal effectively it was determined to send out substantial reinforcements. Some small additions to the strength of the troops in the colony had already been made, but now India was called upon to send a contingent of nearly 6000 men, and other corps were sent from different parts of the world. Even so, the total was only to be raised to something over 14,000 men. The Boers were believed to be capable of mobilising three or four times that number, but 14,000 men were thought sufficient to prevent a successful invasion of the colony, and nothing more than this was contemplated.

As an old Commander-in-Chief in India, White was reluctant to deprive India of any part of its British garrison for the sake of Natal. He knew how small that garrison is at all times for the work it has to perform; and at the moment the Amir of Afghanistan

was ill, which promised trouble. White specially disliked taking away from India, as it was proposed to do, three of its nine British cavalry regiments. But the British Government had decided, with remarkable self-denial, that in case of war with the Transvaal it would forego entirely the help of the Indian army. Regiments of fine Indian cavalry, specially suited for service on the stony uplands of South Africa, could easily have been sent instead of the English troopers, and Indian infantry could also have done good service. The Government preferred to call upon the British garrison, and perhaps for good reasons. However this may be, White deliberately declared in after years that the contingent from India saved Natal, as no doubt it did. It afforded an excellent example of the way in which different parts of the Empire can be organised to help each other in time of war. The mobilisation and despatch of the contingent were remarkably rapid, and White's incessant work when Commander-in-Chief in India upon questions of mobilisation now perhaps repaid him personally. But this is anticipation.

On the 16th September White sailed from Southampton to take up his new work. There he said good-bye to his wife and eldest daughter, and on the same day he wrote a hurried note of farewell to the brother who had been so much to him:—

Good-bye, my dear J. I have much on me. If anything happens to me, look after those that remain behind me. I will try to keep the name up. You have been the closest affection and the longest of my life.

Before sailing White had been much pleased and touched by receiving from the Queen a summons to Osborne, with a message that she "could not let him go without saying good-bye to him." It was one of the many considerate acts by which Her Majesty showed during these eventful years her unceasing thought for the officers and men of her army, and it strengthened the enthusiastic loyalty with which White had always regarded her.

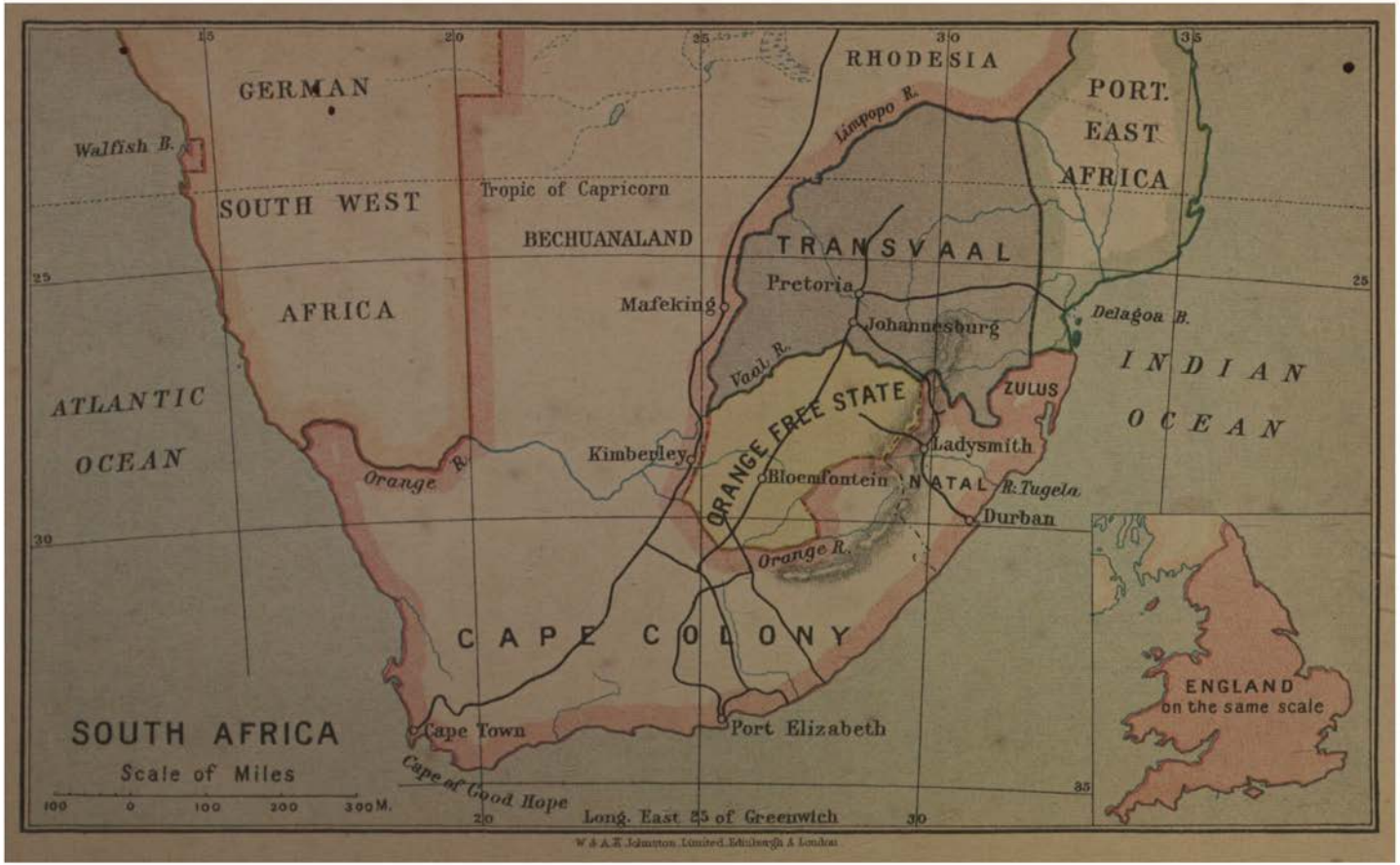
CHAPTER II.

THE POSITION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

THE position of affairs in South Africa was at this time a very serious one. In order to understand the task which George White had been called upon to undertake it seems necessary to examine in some detail the nature of the country, and the political and military conditions as they stood in September 1899, just before the outbreak of war.

The name "South Africa" is somewhat vague, and has been used in various senses, but as used in this book it means the country lying between the sea on the south and the frontier of Rhodesia on the north. It is a vast tract of country, with an area about equal to the combined areas of Germany, France, Great Britain, Spain, and Portugal, but its population is small. In 1899 it contained perhaps a million and a quarter of white people, and five times that number of blacks. Of the white people about half were of British extraction and half of Dutch, though there were some of other blood.

The political condition of South Africa at this



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time was remarkable. For reasons upon which it is unnecessary to enter here, the country, which had once been united under the British flag, was now split up. In the northern part of it was an independent state, the Transvaal, or South African Republic, which was essentially Dutch, but contained also a considerable foreign population, chiefly British, attracted to it by the discovery that it was rich in gold and diamonds. This foreign population, the so-called Uitlanders, had developed the wealth of the Transvaal to an extraordinary degree; but the whole political power was in the hands of the Dutch Boers, or farmers, headed by their famous President, Kruger, who were passionately attached to their independence, and intensely suspicious of any interference on the part of Great Britain. A war between the British and the Boers of the Transvaal in 1881 had been closed by the British defeat at Majuba, and a hasty peace, which had left the Boers with a feeling of contempt for the fighting power of the British soldier and the tenacity of his Government.

Immediately to the south of the Transvaal was the Orange Free State, also independent and Dutch. This state was smaller and less populous than the Transvaal, and had been regarded as more friendly to the British, but of late years it had tended to gravitate towards the kindred Boer state.

The two Boer states between them contained an area considerably larger than Great Britain, and a population estimated at no more than 350,000. They occupied the inner belt of South Africa, and were

surrounded almost on all sides by British territory, or by native territory under British protection. Their country consisted mainly of broad plains, the High Veldt, at an altitude of 4000 feet or so above the sea, with occasional "kopjes," or rugged stony hills, breaking the flat here and there. But there was some mountainous country, and there were also some districts of lower elevation than the High Veldt.

The British territory and protectorates which surrounded the Boer states consisted of two colonies, Cape Colony on the south and Natal on the east, together with the Bechuanaland protectorate on the west and Rhodesia on the north. On one side, the north-east, the Transvaal touched Portuguese territory; and here the British encircling ring was broken, so that the Transvaal could communicate directly with the outer world, and import or export goods without passing through the British sphere of influence. Natal was a colony mainly British in blood and in feeling, though it contained a certain admixture of Dutch. It was a comparatively small territory, and the northern part of it formed an angle wedged in between the two Boer Republics. Its western frontier towards the Orange Free State was formed by the great mountain-range of the Drakensberg, and for a portion of the frontier the territory of the Basuto tribe also lay between Natal and the Free State. Much larger than Natal, Cape Colony marched with the southern border of the Free State. In this colony many districts were Dutch in blood and sentiment.

In 1899 the relations between the Boer Republics and Great Britain had become extremely delicate. It is needless to enter here upon the merits of the questions which were at issue between them. But these were numerous and difficult, and on both sides there had arisen a feeling of strong resentment and suspicion. The Boers apparently believed that, in pressing the claims of the Uitlanders to a share of political power in the Transvaal, the British were encroaching upon their rights and threatening their independence. The British not only thought that their countrymen were being unjustly treated by the Boers, but further believed, from the military preparations made by the two Republics, especially the Transvaal, and the tone adopted by them, that they aimed at nothing less than the total exclusion of the British flag from South Africa, and the creation of a great independent Dutch State, which should include Cape Colony and Natal.

The difficulties in the way of a settlement were increased by the fact that the Boer Republics had sought and gained a considerable measure of sympathy, both among foreign nations and even within the British Empire, which greatly encouraged them in their attitude of opposition to British claims, and weakened the hands of the British Government in dealing with them. Moreover, it was well known that in Cape Colony the sentiment of the Dutch population was strongly in their favour, and that in case of hostilities breaking out, not only would the Orange Free State probably make common cause with

the Transvaal, but the forces of the Republics would be swelled by thousands of Dutchmen from within the British frontier.

Those forces were, even without such aid, sufficiently formidable. While the British troops in South Africa had been allowed to remain at a very low figure, the Republics, whether as a measure of defence against aggression or with more ambitious views, had been for some time importing large quantities of modern guns and munitions of war. They had also elaborated a complete system of mobilisation, which enabled them at short notice to place considerable numbers in the field. In the early summer of 1899, when the negotiations between the Transvaal and Great Britain were becoming daily more unpromising, it was estimated that the two Republics could, in case of need, mobilise more than 50,000 armed Burghers, while the total British forces in South Africa consisted of little more than a fifth of that number. The fighting value of the Boer mounted rifleman was underestimated, but it was known that he could ride and shoot, and that the nature of the country was all in favour of his method of fighting, so that the disparity of force was great. And the British Government was reluctant to take any measures to redress that disparity, for fear of bringing about the very contingency which they hoped to avoid. The despatch of large reinforcements to South Africa, even of reinforcements sufficient merely to ensure the safety of the British colonies from Boer invasion, would, they knew, be represented as a threat,

and would not only tempt the Boers to strike, but also bring about an explosion of anti-British feeling in Europe which might have very embarrassing results. It was difficult to make foreign nations, or even the people of the King's oversea dominions, believe that the "little" South African Republics were contemplating aggression. Naturally enough, the tendency everywhere was to suppose that they could not wish to come into conflict with the power of Great Britain, and that if they went to war it would be only as a last desperate attempt to defend their independence It had apparently been forgotten, except by the Boers themselves, that the action which terminated the war of 1881, and won them their independence, had been fought on British soil. The Boers themselves remembered this, and knew that they were much better prepared than in 1881. They confidently expected that if another war occurred it would open with Boer victories beyond their own frontiers, and be followed by another surrender on the part of Great Britain. And undoubtedly many of them believed, not without reason, that the Boer forces were sufficient to sweep Natal and Cape Colony down to the sea.

It was in these circumstances that the British Government decided to make the military arrangements described in the preceding chapter. They were defensive arrangements, which it was hoped would not provoke war; but if war did break out, offensive action was to follow. The actual line of advance in that event could not then be definitely settled, because there was still just a chance that

even if the Transvaal went to war the Orange Free State might remain neutral, in which case the most direct and promising line, northward from Cape Colony to the Free State capital, Bloemfontein, and thence to Pretoria, could hardly be taken. There remained only two other possible lines of advance: one from Natal direct upon Pretoria; the other, along the railway line to Kimberley, and thence to the westward of the Transvaal by way of Mafeking. Both had serious disadvantages. The final choice could not be made until all doubt about the Free State was at an end; but the doubt was so small that it was in fact practically decided to adopt the first of the three routes, that by Bloemfontein.

CHAPTER III.

ARRIVAL IN SOUTH AFRICA.

WHITE'S voyage to South Africa on board the *Tantallon Castle* was in no way eventful. He had on board with him his old military secretaries, Ian Hamilton and Beauchamp Duff; also Colonel Ward, who was going out as Director of Supplies; Major Fairholme, of the Adjutant-General's Department; Captain Lyon, A.D.C., and other officers. As there seemed to be a fair prospect of active service, the party was a cheerful one.

They touched at Madeira on the 20th September, and found no letters or telegraphic news awaiting them, which was disappointing, for there was now no prospect of further information before their arrival at Capetown a fortnight later, the days of wireless telegraphy not having yet come. But they managed to enjoy themselves in the usual way. White writes to his wife some days afterwards:—

At Madeira we had a very enjoyable morning. I landed with Colonel Hamilton, Frank Lyon, Fairholme, & Colonel Ward, having first posted a letter to you. We went up

2000 feet to an hotel that gives most beautiful views of the anchorage, moving by a very steep railway indeed. We breakfasted in the open air & walked to one or two points from which we got excellent views, & then went down the hill at a great rate in a toboggan. Johnny & I went together, & we thought with our bad luck in breaking our limbs we were rash, especially when our toboggan men demanded *pour boire* halfway down, & got outside a tumbler of Madeira each. After this the pace improved, but we arrived at the wharf without accident. . . .

The *Tantallon Castle* was soon off again, and White settled down seriously to study the books and papers on South Africa which he had brought with him. The task before him was by no means an easy one. What he had to do was to work out as far as possible a plan of operations for the defence of Natal in case of hostilities, and the materials at his disposal for forming an opinion were very incomplete. Of the force which he was to command a large part was on the high seas, and he had no acquaintance with the rest of it, or with the country in which it would have to operate. He had no orders whatever to guide him. Rightly or wrongly, the War Office, when sending him out to command in Natal, had issued no instructions which could interfere with his entire freedom of action. He knew, from personal conversations, that he was not expected to attack and conquer the Boers, which his force was evidently insufficient to do, and that for the present, until Sir Redvers Buller should arrive with the Army Corps, he and the officer commanding in Cape Colony, Forestier Walker, were



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GENERAL SIR BEAUCHAMP DUFF, G.C.B., &c.

to be entirely independent of each other. He also knew that in the general belief Natal would be the first objective of the Boers in case hostilities broke out, but this was a matter of conjecture.

He was not even certain what his enemy was to be, for it was still doubtful whether, in the event of war with the Transvaal, the Orange Free State would throw in its lot with the latter or remain neutral. Owing to the fact that the Free State marched with Natal on the west, its attitude would make a great difference to the military position.

In these difficult circumstances White had one ground for satisfaction, the knowledge that the officer now commanding the small force in Natal was a tried lieutenant of his own, in whom he had the greatest confidence. I have described elsewhere how White had employed Penn Symons in various posts in Burma, and had found him exceptionally able; how, when arranging for the Tirah expedition, he had selected Symons as "the most competent man in India (British or Indian Services) to command an infantry division"; and how the Commander of that trying expedition, Lockhart, had reported that "no one could have done better." Penn Symons had now been a couple of months in Natal, and must with his usual energy have done much to obtain a personal knowledge of the problems involved. Some weeks before he had written to White:—

The situation is as critical as it can be, and I am ready to move troops into their positions, to do their best to protect

Natal, in two hours. . . . I respect our maybe enemy for his love of independence, for his power of mobility, and for his marksmanship. I think also that he has generally behaved fairly well in previous wars. His rule, however, is abominably bad and corrupt.

The supremacy of England in South Africa is no doubt at stake.

It was a comfort to White to feel that he had on the spot already, awaiting his arrival, so brave and capable a soldier, and one who so thoroughly recognised the importance of the issue.

In the meantime all he could do was to study the position himself with the aid of maps and books, and of any persons on board, besides his staff, who could give him local information. Clearly realising from the first that his *rôle* was to be a subordinate one, and that his business was simply to "hold up his end" until the Army Corps could arrive in South Africa, he was by no means eager for hostilities. On the contrary, as it seemed to him, delay was all to the advantage of the British, and nothing should be done to provoke a conflict. But he felt also that the Boers of the Transvaal must naturally regard the situation from the opposite point of view, and that they had every reason to strike as soon as possible, before a large British force could be assembled in South Africa. Further, he was convinced that in all probability the Boers of the Free State would make common cause with the Boers of the Transvaal, or at least that it was his business to assume this. And, assuming this, he came to the conclusion that the

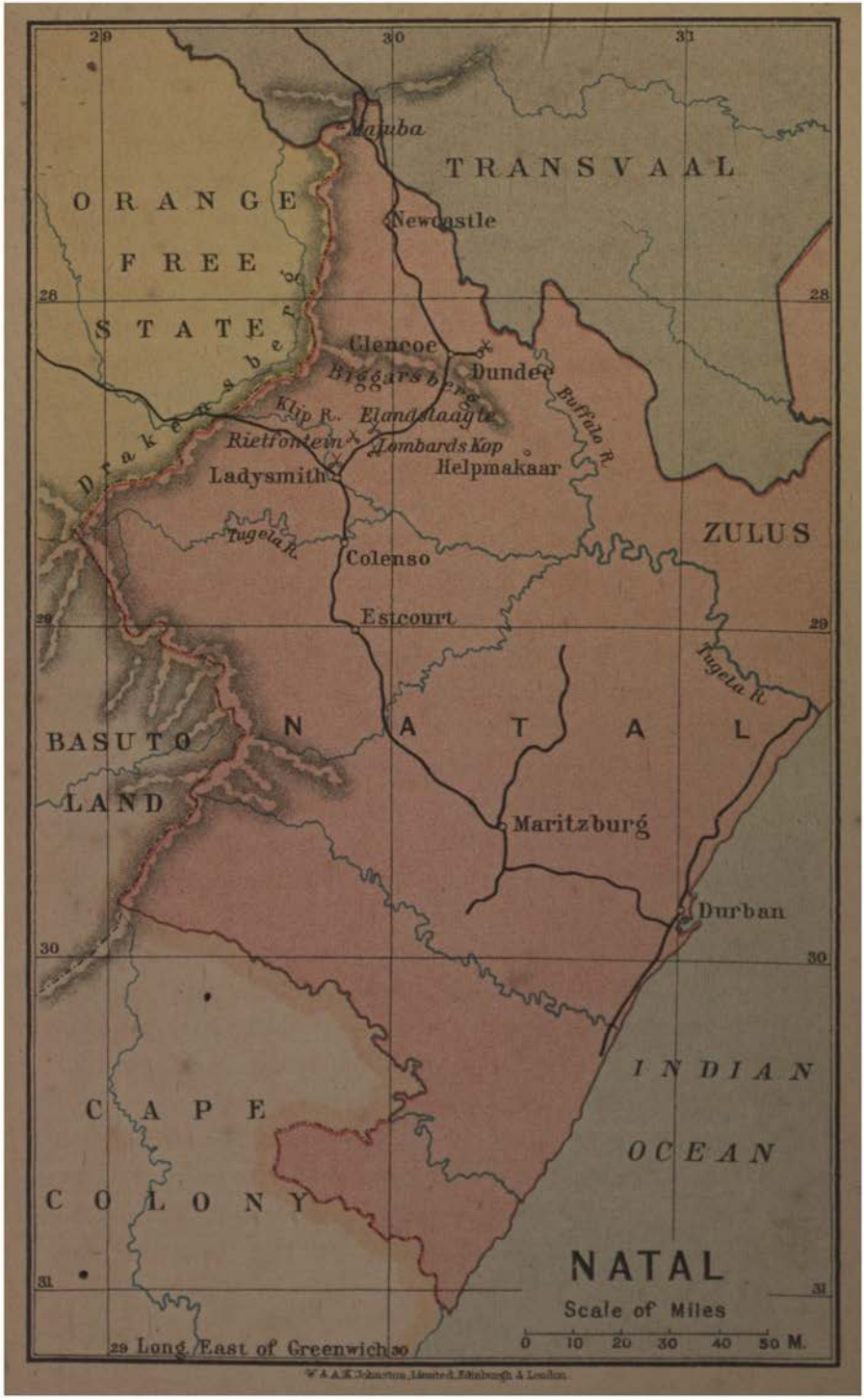
main objective of the allied governments on the outbreak of hostilities would almost certainly be a combined invasion of Natal.

The reasons for this conclusion were sufficiently obvious. The Boers regarded Natal as a country of which they had been unjustly deprived, and their old sentimental connection with it was strong. Also the northern part of the colony had been the scene of the fighting in the war of 1881, fighting which had ended triumphantly for the Boers at the battle of Majuba. Then Natal was from a strategical point of view the natural field for the operation of combined forces from the two states. If the allied governments decided to make their main attack upon Cape Colony, which lay to the south of the Orange Free State, the Transvaal Boers, who formed the bulk of the whole, would have to march right across the Free State, for two or three hundred miles, before they could come into action. Natal, on the other hand, pushed up between the two states, and offered a tempting objective against which both could strike in unison, easily and rapidly, each from its own base. Finally, it was a much simpler and shorter operation to sweep down to the sea at Durban than to reach Capetown, and the results would be equally good, perhaps better. It is true that there was, or soon would be, a larger British force in Natal than in Cape Colony; but in one sense this offered an additional attraction to the Boers. Not only would it be dangerous for them to leave the Natal force in their rear, but, knowing that they were superior in numbers and in mobility, they

had good reason to hope that this force would be unable to hold its own; and, in that case, the larger it was the greater would be the consequences of its defeat upon the fortunes of the whole war. If the Boers could strike a swift and heavy blow in Natal, their wavering sympathisers all over the country would be encouraged to rise, and might join them in thousands; foreign powers might intervene; and at all events the victorious allies, throwing themselves upon the southern theatre of war after they had disposed of Natal, might fairly expect to break through the weak line of British troops holding the frontier, and then march down to Capetown itself through a country where they could count upon the sympathies of half the population. Therefore the general belief that in case of hostilities Natal would be the first objective of the Boers seemed to have a solid foundation, and White accepted it.

It will be seen from the map that the more northerly portion of the colony consists of a narrow triangle wedged in between the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Any attempt to defend this wedge of land against largely superior forces capable of advancing from both east and west, as well as from the north, seemed exceedingly dangerous, especially as the invaders could in every direction conceal their movements behind a mountain screen.

On the other hand, it was of course desirable not to surrender to the enemy more of the colony than military principles demanded, and especially not to fall back beyond Ladysmith, at the base of the



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triangle, where we had a considerable garrison and a large collection of military stores, and where the railway lines from the Transvaal and the Free State met. To let this place fall into Boer hands would involve a serious sacrifice, moral and material; and would enable the invading forces to concentrate unopposed, with their railway lines intact behind them. Ladysmith therefore must be retained.

To the north of it a rough range of hills, the Biggarsberg, runs east and west across a large part of the width of the colony, and seems to offer a fine defensive position, which Ladysmith itself can hardly be said to do, for Ladysmith lies on low ground, commanded by the hills which surround it in all directions. After full consideration, therefore, White decided provisionally, subject to reconsideration on the spot, that the Biggarsberg would form his main position. He did not intend to make it a purely defensive one. On the contrary, he meant to use his force offensively, striking out at separate bodies of the enemy as chance might offer, and if possible beating them in succession in the open field. But the Biggarsberg was to be his strong point, by holding which he would cover Ladysmith and the rest of the colony, and prevent any further advance to the south, while interposing between the two main lines of Boer communication—the railways from the north and the west. It was afterwards found that the line of the Biggarsberg was, as a permanent position, untenable for lack of water, and also that it was too far north to prevent dangerous flank attacks from the passes

of the Drakensberg, so that White was forced to abandon his intention and make Ladysmith itself his strong point. But the matter is mentioned here because Lord Wolseley, in his evidence before the War Commission some years later, indicated the Biggarsberg as the position which White should have occupied, and declared that Ladysmith was no position at all. Theoretically, with the information to be obtained at a distance, he was doubtless right, and, as I have said, White came to much the same conclusion. "A force massed on the Biggarsberg" was what his letters show he contemplated. But opinions on such matters formed at a distance often have to be discarded after personal consideration on the spot.

Early on the morning of the 3rd October, "in drizzling rain and very cold," White's ship was off Capetown, and it may be imagined that his anxiety for news was intense. The news when it came was not good. Hardly had the ship got alongside the jetty when General Forestier Walker was on board. He had come to meet White, and take him up to see the High Commissioner, Sir Alfred Milner. The General reported that war had not yet been declared, but that it could hardly be averted, and that the population of Cape Colony was largely on the side of the Boers. The situation was discussed at length by the three men mainly concerned—the sorely-tried High Commissioner, who, White wrote, looked "worked and worried," and the two military Chiefs.

Milner, upon whom such a burden of responsibility had fallen, naturally felt that Cape Colony was in grave danger; and he would have liked to strengthen the British force in the colony so as to overawe the disaffected and prevent the exodus of fighting rebels, which had already begun. But Milner and Forestier Walker, "a charming gentleman," as White called him, both appreciated the fact that it was impossible to be strong enough everywhere, and that the only chance of success lay in concentrating the British strength at the most important point. With a detachment of view which did them both much credit, they recognised that for the time the important point was Natal, and that the safety of Cape Colony must be subordinated to the checking of the main Boer attack on the eastern theatre of war. They therefore decided to content themselves in Cape Colony with something very like what the official historian of the war has called a policy of bluff, and to leave to White in Natal all, or almost all, the troops which were assembling there from over seas, thus avoiding what would have been a weak and probably fatal policy of dissemination of forces. White had good reason during the next few months to feel grateful to them for their broad-minded unselfishness.

Meanwhile the imminence of war, and the extreme gravity of the position in Natal, where the organisation of the defence did not admit of an hour's delay, decided White to change his plans. Instead of remaining a day or so in Capetown and going

on to Durban in the ship which had brought him, he arranged to start the same evening by train to Port Elizabeth, right across the colony, where another vessel was to await him and take him on. It was an interesting journey, and opened his eyes regarding the state of affairs. The following is a letter to his wife, written at the end of it:—

To Lady White.

SS. "Scot" (Union Line), *6th October* 99.

At nearly every station the people appeared to be divided into two camps, one English & one Dutch. The railway is manned chiefly by Englishmen, Station Masters, Guards, Conductors, etc.; but grouped by themselves at most stations were parties of Boers, bearded, with slouched hats, looking physically, I thought, above the standard of the English, but intellectually much below them. At some stations the Dutch were travelling from our Colony with arms in their hands, presumably to join their Countrymen across the border. We constantly passed bands of refugees or persons that had been ordered out of the Transvaal & Orange Free State. I had not before realized what a large proportion of Dutch there are in the Cape Colony, & how sharp-edged is the antagonism between the races. . . .

For the next three months the Dutch have the best of us as regards armed strength & position. A little success might give them enormous advantage. . . .

If I am to have a look-in in this campaign important events will probably take place before this reaches you. If the Boers take the initiative & I can beat them heavily, I believe the war will be practically over. If they gain the first successes the consequences may be very far reaching. The telegraph will have told you before this reaches you. Every day we can put off the Boer advance the better for us. The Indian troops

are landing at Durban & are well up to time, but I would like to have another fortnight to organize them & their transport before the storm breaks. It is all most interesting, & I have charming men to work with. . . .

This is my lucky day, 6th October, Charasia day. May it be a date of good omen for us all.

Your most affectionate

GEORGE.

CHAPTER IV.

ARRIVAL IN NATAL.

THE *Scot* steamed into the picturesque harbour of Durban on the morning of the 7th October, and White had his first sight of the famous Natal port, with its residential quarters clustering upon the wooded hills above it, like another Torquay.

But he had little leisure to admire the view, and set to work at once to ascertain the precise number of reinforcements which had arrived before him. The information he received on this point was on the whole satisfactory. Acting with commendable promptitude on the receipt of orders, the government of India had embarked their contingent of nearly 6000 men in the shortest possible time. The telegram asking for the despatch of the contingent had been sent on the 8th September. By the 2nd of October some of the troops were beginning to land at Durban, 3500 miles distant from Bombay, and the rest of them arrived in rapid succession, most of them by the 9th of the month. The reinforcements ordered from

Europe and Egypt were not so quick in coming, but they also arrived before the end of October.

White afterwards declared on more than one occasion that the Indian contingent saved Natal, and the situation in South Africa. There can be no doubt that he was right in this view, and that Lord Lansdowne exercised a wise discretion in running the risk of denuding India of a part of its British garrison. If when the fighting began a few days later White had been weaker by three batteries of artillery, two regiments of cavalry,[1] and three battalions of infantry, his position would have been a desperate one. Certainly he would have had no chance of holding Ladysmith; and between Ladysmith and Durban there was no strong place to stop a superior Boer force. Durban itself might have been held by White's force, if it still existed, and the guns of the fleet; but it would then have been necessary to reconquer the colony from the sea.

After a day spent in Durban, making himself acquainted with the state of affairs and arranging for the movements of the incoming troops, White went on to Pietermaritzburg, the Colonial capital, three hours distant by rail, where he found awaiting him the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson, and Major-General Sir William Penn Symons.

Even with the troops from India in hand, White's position at this moment was singularly difficult. The outbreak of war appeared to be imminent, and he had

[1] One, the 9th Lancers, had gone on to Capetown.

just landed in Natal, of which he had no personal knowledge. He might expect an immediate invasion of the colony by Boer forces, perhaps amounting to 30,000 or more. To meet this invasion, if it occurred, he might hope to have something like 15,000 troops of all kinds—a considerable portion of which would be "mere units, lacking war organisation except on paper, unknown to their leaders and staff, unacquainted with the country, and with both horses and men out of condition after their sea voyage."[1] Nor was this all. The troops when White arrived were divided into two bodies—the larger, consisting of about 8000 men, at Ladysmith; the smaller, consisting of over 4000 men, at Glencoe, a station on the railway forty-two miles north of Ladysmith, where they had been sent to protect the adjacent coal-mines of Dundee and the northern part of Natal. There were also detachments along the line of communications south of Ladysmith. Now in case of an advance in force by the Boers it seemed likely that the Free State men would come from the west over the passes of the Drakensberg, while the Transvaalers would come from the north and east. In that event the comparatively small force about Glencoe might find itself enveloped and cut off from Ladysmith; for it could hardly be expected to make head against five or six times its numbers. And such a misfortune would have a very serious effect upon the whole military situation.

White at once recognised the danger of this division of forces, and determined to put an end to it.

[1] Sir F. Maurice's History.

He held that from a military point of view it was impossible to justify, and that the proper course was the concentration of his force in some good position, from which he could strike with his full strength at the gathering enemy if a chance should occur. Glencoe he regarded as an undesirable point for such a concentration, because it was too far north, and the Boers would be able to strike from right and left at his line of communications with Maritzburg and Durban. The line of the Biggarsberg, which he had originally contemplated, was to some extent open to this objection also, and was further barred by the difficulty of obtaining water. In view of these circumstances White came to the conclusion that he must concentrate at Ladysmith, where the bulk of his force was already assembled, and must withdraw the Glencoe force.

This decision he explained personally at a conference attended by the Governor, by Sir William Penn Symons, and by Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter, who had come from India to join Sir Redvers Buller, and had, pending Buller's arrival, been retained in Natal to act as White's Chief of the Staff. White's proposal met with strong opposition. Symons, always a confident soldier, believed that with such a force as he had at Glencoe, and with a country about him peculiarly suited to the action of trained troops, he would be able to strike some severe blows at the gathering forces of the enemy, and that with the support of the troops at Ladysmith the colony could be held up to the more northerly point. Hely

Hutchinson also protested vigorously against the withdrawal. It would, he said, involve grave political results; loyalists would be disgusted and discouraged; many if not most of the Natal Dutch would very likely rise, and the evil might spread to the Dutch in Cape Colony; while the effect on the natives, of whom there were 750,000 in Natal and Zululand, might be disastrous. He could not answer for what they, or at all events a large portion of them, might do.

These objections were undoubtedly strong, and it is no answer to say that a military commander in the field should not allow himself to be influenced by political considerations. White knew how the Zulus had fought us twenty years before at Isandula and Rorke's Drift. Their spirit was said to have been greatly broken since then; but the prospect of a native rising was nevertheless a terrible one. Scores of thousands of negro fighting men suddenly let loose upon an almost defenceless colony might perpetrate raids and massacres of an appalling character, and would, moreover, threaten his own communications.

Viewed in that light the objections urged by Hely Hutchinson were not merely political. White could not but feel that, representing as they did the opinions of the whole Natal Government, they were worthy of the most serious attention. An attack upon the colony in his rear would be a grievous military embarrassment, and might necessitate the weakening of his force to an extent which would make it insufficient to hold its own against the Boers.

In fact both courses of action open to him seemed to involve risk, and it was not easy to say which involved the greater risk. In the end White decided that he would not for the moment insist upon his own view. He would permit the existing arrangements to stand provisionally, supporting Glencoe as effectively as possible from Ladysmith, and watching the development of the situation. As large a portion as possible of his Ladysmith troops would be kept free for active operations in the field, and with this force he would try himself to deal some blows at the separate bodies of the enemy. If the Glencoe force seemed to be in danger it would be withdrawn. White put the case to the War Office as follows :—

> Boer ultimatum finds us short of 5th Dragoon Guards, Gloucesters, Borders, and Royal Irish Fusiliers. I therefore considered it sounder in a military sense to withdraw from Glencoe and concentrate at Ladysmith. The Governor, however, considers withdrawal from Glencoe would be disastrous politically, involving great risk of native rising and Dutch rebellion in Colony. I have therefore determined to hold on to both places.

It is possible that White's decision may have been wrong, and that he would have done better, as Lord Roberts afterwards thought, to have withdrawn the Glencoe force at once; but it must be admitted that the question was a very doubtful one, and that if White, immediately on his arrival in the colony, had overridden the views both of the Natal Government and of the soldier commanding on the

spot, he would not only have shown extraordinary self-confidence, but might have brought about a real disaster. The upshot was that Penn Symons left Maritzburg for Glencoe, and White went on to Ladysmith, where he arrived on the 11th October.

Meanwhile, on the 9th, the Boers had issued their ultimatum, the time allowed for an answer expiring on the evening of the 11th. The terms of the ultimatum were such as could not be accepted, and White therefore arrived at the Headquarters of his force on the very day that war broke out. Before starting he wrote to his wife :—

To Lady White.

P. MARITZBURG, 11*th October* 1899.

I have been so knocked about and had so much to do that I have not had a minute to write to you. I am off to-day to Ladysmith to take command there, where the storm will probably first burst. It is a time of great anxiety, as the Boers' declaration of War comes on us before the arrival of reinforcements that I had hoped to have at my disposal. These include the King's Dragoon Guards, the Gloucester, the Border, & the Royal Irish Fusiliers—four regiments in all, and such a force makes a great difference. I would gladly have the force concentrated at Ladysmith under the circumstances, but I found a force at Glencoe Junction, and the Governor of Natal considers that to remove that force now & to concentrate all at Ladysmith would involve very great risk of the natives rising & of the Dutchmen in our territory declaring for the enemy.

Under these conditions I have considered myself bound to fight it out at Ladysmith and at Glencoe.

By the time this reaches you I hope the worst will be

over, but I cannot hide from myself that we have to face greatly superior numbers in positions which it is very difficult for us to know where to strike, or indeed where the enemy may make an effort. They are all round us. . . . I feel we *may* be isolated in a day or two.

I would like to wire "Viretum" to you, but it would only make you more anxious; so, when this arrives, you will know that I was thinking of you all with deep love. . . .

To his brother he wrote :—

P. MARITZBURG, 11*th October* 99.

The Boers are certain to declare war to-night, and I am far from being confident in the military position here.

I found troops at Glencoe Junction, and also of course at Ladysmith. The Governor thinks it absolutely necessary politically to hold Glencoe, and I had hoped to have had sufficient force to hold both it and Ladysmith sufficiently strongly, but the authorities at home have diverted the 9th Lancers to the Cape Colony, where they are also very short of troops, and the 5th Dragoon Guards, the Border Regiment, the Gloucester Regiment, and the Royal Irish Fusiliers are still at sea. This makes the present military position much weaker than I could wish, and when the ultimatum was reported I considered it would be a wise military measure to withdraw from Glencoe and concentrate on Ladysmith. The Governor, who is a very good fellow, and helpful, however said that he considered to withdraw from Glencoe would involve a grave risk of the natives rising against us, and of all the Dutch in Natal joining in against us. I therefore told him I would hold on to both Glencoe and Ladysmith.

I think it possible that with their great numbers and mobility the Boers may isolate us even at Ladysmith, and

I want to send you a line from this before I leave, to repeat all I said before leaving England. . . . It is hard not having been able to get a line from any of you, but I have travelled very fast, and am where I ought to be, in the front.—Ever yours, GEORGE.

White's first care on arrival at Ladysmith was to strengthen the place as much as possible, so that in case of things going wrong in the field he might have an entrenched position on which he could fall back. A committee was formed to report upon the question at once, and their report was submitted with admirable promptitude. White himself rode over the whole line of the proposed defences, which were about 14 miles in length, and settled all outstanding details. He also made arrangements for a rapid increase in the accumulation of food stores. Then, having done all he could to make Ladysmith safe from attack, he turned to meet the advancing enemy, determined to fall upon the Boer columns as they gave him an opportunity. He had no intention of standing on the defensive further than might be necessary. A strong offensive defence was very much better suited to his character and antecedents; and much better suited also to the spirit of his officers and men, who were eager to get at the enemy. All alike felt that the defeats of the last war must be wiped out, and that there must be no second peace until the power of the two aggressive republics had been finally broken. "I admire Sir George immensely," one of his staff wrote; "he is not in the least fussy, is very shrewd, and does nothing without

careful deliberation." And a few days later: "Sir George is splendid, full of fight." He had been full of fight all his life, and had been able to show it for twenty years, ever since he made his name at Charasia. But he was now to meet a formidable enemy, who would give him all the fighting he wanted.

CHAPTER V.

THE OUTBREAK OF WAR.

INDEED the Boers had hardly delayed an hour after the expiry of the time given in their ultimatum, when their advance began; and on the 12th October, the very day after White's arrival in Ladysmith, while the first arrangements were being made for considering the defences of the town, the enemy's troops were over the border.

On that date White telegraphs to the War Office:—

> Four thousand Boers with 18 guns have invaded Natal from Free State *viâ* Tintwa Pass. They are probably encamped to-night ten miles west of Acton Homes. I move out to meet them at 3 A.M. to-morrow with 5th Lancers, three field batteries, one Mountain Battery, Liverpools, Gordons, Manchesters, and one other Battalion which comes from Glencoe by train to-night. Also with 250 Natal Carbineers and a Colonial Battery. No occasion for public alarm. I believe myself stronger than the enemy. Spirit of the troops excellent.

Now the Tintwa Pass was almost due west of Ladysmith, so the Boers showed from the first that

they understood the advantage of threatening that place in addition to any movements they might be making from the north. Such action tied White down, and prevented his sending the bulk of his force to join Symons in any offensive action against the northern contingents. White's prompt action, on the other hand, showed the spirit in which he intended to meet the situation, by striking out at any body of the enemy which gave him a chance.

The attempt, however, was of no great advantage. The enemy was not found. Warned no doubt by some of the innumerable spies with which Ladysmith was full, and being all mounted men able to march three times as fast as British infantry, they had easily evaded the blow aimed at them and disappeared into space. At the same time the British scouts brought in reports that parties of the Free State enemy were pushing through other passes to the westward, while to the north and north-west the Transvaal Boers were occupying points within British territory, and were daily growing stronger.

It was a trying week, watching in vain for a chance, while the mobile and elusive enemy closed gradually upon White and Symons, and news of threatening movements on their part came from both sides of the line of communication to the southward. By the 17th of the month White evidently felt extreme inconvenience from the division of his troops. He writes to Lord Camperdown :—

I am realising exactly what I anticipated the situation would be. The Boers are all round in numbers that must, at

least, be four times ours. I get demands for help from all sides. If I gave it I should be beaten in detail. My one plan is to hold together a sufficient force to strike with if I get the chance. The Boers have positions of the greatest strength, & are closing in. I look at the map & long to strike out, but feel that, so far, it would be folly to do so. Van Reenan's Pass is nearest to me, but the road is the only approach. They have numerous guns in position to command it, & all other approaches are precipitous. They are some 35 miles off, & I could not hope to withdraw rapidly with wounded. If Symons' force, now at Dundee, was here, I could strike out. . . .

And a day later he made an effort to bring Symons back. It should be explained that when agreeing, against his own view, to the Glencoe proposal, White had instructed Symons to find a defensible position, to entrench it, and to make certain that he had an assured water supply inside it. Symons, supremely confident that in the open ground about Glencoe he could use his force to great advantage, had perhaps paid less attention to these instructions than he might have done, and this had come to White's knowledge. On the 18th October, therefore, he telegraphed to Symons :—

I have been in communication with Governor, and he thinks the political importance of your force remaining at Dundee has already greatly decreased.

Maritzburg is now threatened, and I have to reinforce it heavily. If, therefore, you are not absolutely confident of being able to entrench yourself strongly, with an assured water supply within your position, fall back on Ladysmith at once. Reply as quickly as possible.

This telegram was sent off at half-past one in the morning. Two hours later arrived the answer, which was as follows:—

133 urgent. Clear the line. I cannot fulfil the conditions you impose, namely, to strongly entrench myself here with an assured water supply within my position. I must therefore comply with your order to retire. Please to send trains to remove civilians that still remain in Dundee, our stores, and sick. I must give out that I am moving stores and camp to Glencoe junction in view of attacking Newcastle at once.

At the same hour—3.30 A.M.—and apparently in reply to this telegram, though this is not certain, White telegraphed again:—

Sent at 3.30 A.M. on 18th October 1899. With regard to water, are you confident you can supply your camp for an indefinite period? The difficulties and risk of withdrawing civil population and military stores are great, and railway may be cut any day. Do you yourself, after considering these difficulties, think it better to remain at Dundee and prefer it?

Symons replied:—

Glencoe Camp, 18th October. 134. Clear the line. We can and must stay here. I have no doubt whatever that this is the proper course. I have cancelled all orders for moving.

This peremptory telegram settled the question, and White closed the correspondence with the following words:—

Sent at 6 A.M., 18th October. Your 134 to clear line. I fully support you. Make particulars referred to by me as

safe as possible. Difficulties and disadvantages of other course have decided me to support your views.

One of the difficulties referred to by White was that almost all the available rolling-stock on the line would be required for the move, and that it might be lost. That this was not a fanciful fear is shown by the fact that the line was in fact cut by the Boers next day, the 19th.

Thus were decided the movements of the outlying force, and the opening operations of the war. There was much discussion on the subject at the time, and it seems as well to give the telegrams verbatim, though they have already been given in the Report of the Royal Commission.

On the 19th October White reported that the Free State Boers had advanced some distance from the western passes, and that he had moved his camp to a position covering Ladysmith, in the hope of striking a blow; but he had no success, the enemy again retiring. In the north, railway communication with Glencoe was interrupted, the enemy having advanced over the Biggarsberg and captured a goods train at Elandslaagte, seventeen miles above Ladysmith.

So ended a weary week of waiting and preparation. At the end of it matters were not in too satisfactory a position. Arrangements had been set on foot for entrenching a circle of hills round Ladysmith, and for increasing the depôt of supplies; but White's force was divided, two-thirds at Ladysmith, one-third at Dundee, with the railway cut between them; and the

enemy was not only swamping Northern Natal with large numbers of mounted Burghers, backed, it was said, by some formidable heavy guns, but also threatening Ladysmith from the west. It looked as if the British forces and their veteran commander were about to sustain an onslaught which would try them severely.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CONTENDING FORCES.

It has been said that White's intention was not to await the onslaught of the Boers, but, having made Ladysmith as far as possible secure as a "point d'appui" upon which he could fall back if overmatched in the field, to hold as large a part of his force as possible ready for offensive action, and to attack the enemy wherever a chance might occur of beating him in detail before his advancing columns could meet and combine. This plan was evidently the right one, and in pursuance of it four considerable actions were fought by White or his subordinates at a distance from Ladysmith during the latter part of October.

But before describing these actions, and the result of them, it may be well to say a few words with regard to the numbers and composition of the opposing forces, and the nature of the ground upon which they were about to contend. There has been so much misconception on this head that although the matter has been elucidated in more than one history of the war, it would

be undesirable to pass on to the actual fighting without a brief statement of the conditions under which it was to be carried on.

As to the nature of the ground, it is only necessary to say that the northern part of the Natal Colony consisted of rolling uplands largely bare of forest, where the hills, though often rugged and precipitous, yet as a rule offered a wide field of fire both for artillery and for riflemen, and could be crossed in all directions by mounted troops. It was rough country, but fairly open, and there were few if any positions where an inferior force could hold its own for long against enveloping movements.

As to the numbers of the opposing forces, it is not easy to form an accurate opinion, but after comparing the various estimates given on both sides, it seems fairly clear that on the British side there were in Natal, all told, including militia, volunteers, and police, between 15,000 and 16,000 men, of whom possibly 12,000 were in Ladysmith or north of it, while the Boers had across the Natal border about 24,000 of the 48,000 men they had mobilised. In numbers, therefore, White had about two men to three, and his available field force, including the detachment under Symons, was about in the proportion of one to two.

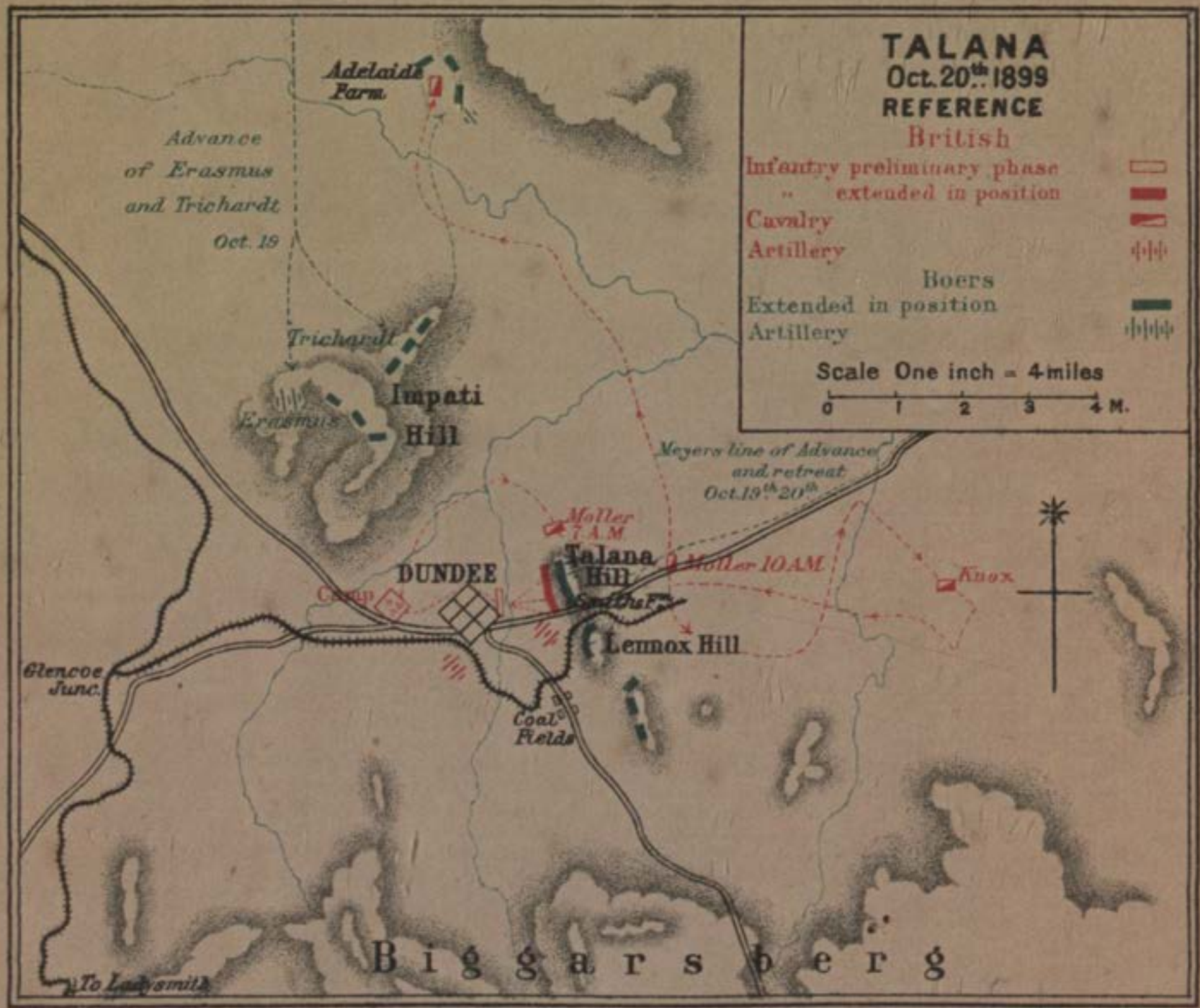
With regard to the composition of the two forces, White's force consisted for the most part of regular troops, who were presumably superior in discipline and tactical efficiency to any irregulars; but it is to be remembered that they were a "scratch" force, hastily

assembled from various parts of the world, and that many of them were just landed after a long sea voyage —their horses quite unfit for immediate work. The Boers, on the other hand, were almost entirely irregulars, burghers mobilised for the war, without the discipline and organisation of trained soldiers. But it must not be inferred that they were therefore simply armed civilians, such as could have been raised from among the population of a state in Europe—"mere farmers," as they were often described to be. No description of them could have been farther from the truth. The Boers had in some ways received much more preparation for a soldier's work than the British soldier who fought against them. Many of them had been brought up from childhood to shoot and to ride and to scout. All this has to be elaborately taught to the British recruit, with what difficulty no one can know who has not tried. Finally, and this is a fact the importance of which can hardly be overestimated, the Boers were all mounted men, and could move three times as fast as the British infantry soldier. With their deadly marksmanship, the marksmanship of lifelong sportsmen, a frontal attack upon them was sure to be very costly to their assailants; and if the British tried a flank attack it was easy for a body of Boers to canter out on their hardy ponies and form a fresh front which our slow-moving infantry could not turn. Their mobility, in fact, had the effect of greatly increasing their numbers. Thoroughly well armed, both as regards artillery and rifles, with a trained eye for ground, and surrounded by a population which was

largely on their side, they were a formidable enemy. They had their limitations, notably the reluctance to face heavy loss for a military object, and the lack of that discipline without which great combined operations cannot be carried out; but as partisan fighters they were hard to beat.

It may perhaps be remarked here that White was about to meet his enemy with a force composed entirely of white men; for, as already observed, the British Government had decided, rightly or wrongly, to make this a white man's war, and to give up the incalculable military advantage which would have accrued to them by employing against the Boers a contingent of Indian troops. It was a great sacrifice, and one which few nations would have made. Russia has always used her Cossacks in European warfare. In the Franco-German War of 1870 the French brought over Spahis and Turkos to fight against the Germans. Still more striking is the fact that in the American Civil War the North enlisted considerable numbers of negroes to fight against the Confederates. If therefore the British Government, when faced by war in South Africa, had brought over from India, instead of, or in addition to, her contingent of white men, a much larger force of picked troops drawn from the Indian fighting races, it is not easy to see how any one could reasonably have found fault with their action. The Indian army consisted of regular troops, trained and commanded by British officers, and many of them belonging to ancient races which stood high in the scale of civilisation. And in some respects the Indian troops

were really better fitted than the British for meeting an enemy so mobile as the Boers. The cavalry especially, light men well mounted, on handy little horses accustomed to hard ground and rough food, with many regiments inured to the constant warfare of the North-West Frontier, would have proved extremely useful on the veldt or among the stony valleys and hills of Upper Natal, where scouting power and rapidity in action were essential to success. India could have spared two Indian soldiers for every white man, or in addition to the white men, and it would have been difficult to overestimate the value of such a reinforcement thrown into Natal at the beginning of the war. Perhaps the Queen's Government judged aright as to the feeling in Great Britain and the oversea dominions when they promulgated their self-denying ordinance, and in the end they may not have suffered thereby, for South Africa is peculiarly situated in regard to colour feeling; but it must be admitted that the immediate loss was great. It involved meeting the enemy with very inferior numbers.



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CHAPTER VII.

TALANA HILL, 20TH OCTOBER 1899.

It has been explained in Chapter V. of this volume that on the 18th October, a week after White's arrival in Ladysmith, he had found himself obliged finally to sanction the proposal of Penn Symons to remain at Dundee, and that on the following day he had received news of the cutting of the railway line between the two places. The natural conclusion was that the Boers were trying to surround Symons and attack one-third of the British force separately, while holding off the remaining two-thirds from coming to its assistance.

This was in fact precisely what they were doing. The Boer Commander-in-Chief — General Joubert, a cautious old veteran of the last war — had crossed the northern border of Natal on the 12th October, but moving slowly, with extreme circumspection for fear of a surprise, had got no farther than Newcastle, about thirty miles, by the 16th. There, finding that there seemed to be no prospect of an attack on the part of the British, he made up his mind

to strike a blow, and orders were issued for an advance.

This was to take place in three columns. One, the left, under Lukas Meyer, apparently consisting of four or five thousand men, was to march down outside the eastern frontier of Natal until it reached a point nearly due east of Dundee; the centre column, under Erasmus, five thousand strong, was to move straight down on Dundee from the north, and occupy the Impati Hill due north of the British camp; the third column, under Kock, less than a thousand men, was to make a wide sweep to the right, get into touch if possible with the Free State men in the western passes, and then, taking up a position in the Biggarsberg, to cut the railway line below Dundee. On the night of the 19th the three columns were to close on Dundee, and to attack Symons simultaneously from north, east, and west. As Symons had with him about 3280 infantry, 497 cavalry, and 18 guns, it was calculated that he would be attacked by more than double his numbers, and that the cutting of the railway would prevent any help coming to him until too late.

The Boer leaders carried out their encircling movements with success, and on the 19th were all in their appointed stations, with the railway duly cut at Elandslaagte, twenty-five miles from Glencoe. Symons, it appears, had good information, and was fully aware of their plan; but, relying with confidence upon the fighting power of his force, he made no attempt to thwart it, and waited in his camp

until they should come within striking distance, when he hoped to fall upon them and deal a heavy blow at one or more of their converging columns as they tried the difficult task of meeting from three directions at night on the field of battle. An excellent tactician, with a high reputation for his skill in handling troops on the field, and a poor opinion of the fighting capacity of Boer levies in the open, he had little doubt of the result.

It must have been an anxious time for White in Ladysmith, especially after he received news of the fall of Elandslaagte; for not only was Dundee in peril, but the Free State Boers were threatening Ladysmith from the west, and he learnt that another Boer force was threatening the Colonial capital—Pietermaritzburg—from the east.

On the morning of the 20th October, at 5.30 A.M., the blow fell, for he then received a telegram from Glencoe — "Boers shelling camp with big guns. Troops moving out"; and at intervals during the day came further news showing that a severe action was in progress. Towards evening the news was so far satisfactory that the Boers were reported to have been attacked and driven out of an almost inaccessible position, retiring eastward; but it was also reported that our losses had been heavy, and that General Penn Symons himself had been mortally wounded. Altogether the news was not cheering. The actual course of the fighting and its result must now be described.

The isolation of Symons and his brigade from

Ladysmith, at a distance of more than forty miles, had been in itself a matter to cause serious anxiety, as the whole course of White's correspondence clearly showed. The news that the force was not strongly entrenched or provided with an assured water supply had naturally increased that anxiety; and the information which White received of the nature of the position was doubly disquieting, for the camp selected by Symons — between Dundee and Glencoe junction—was in a valley almost surrounded by hills, which seemed to offer to a superior force supplied with a heavier artillery formidable opportunities of surrounding the British and obliging them to fight at a disadvantage. White did not know the ground accurately, for, overworked as he was, during the week following the outbreak of war, with the task of putting Ladysmith and its long line of communications into a condition of safety, he had not been able to go up to Dundee. But he must have known that the position was a doubtful one. He could only trust to the proved tactical skill of his lieutenant, and the probable lack of such skill among the untried Boer commanders, to give Symons the chance for which he longed of smiting the enemy in detail. Symons himself rightly believed that the enemy would show little cohesion in attack, and had no belief in, or at all events no fear of, his alleged superiority in heavy guns.

It will be seen from the accompanying map that to the north of the British camp, at a distance of

about 5000 yards, was the Impati mountain—a flat-topped mass some 1200 or 1300 feet above the valley; while to the east of the camp rise the hills of Talana and Lennox—the former about 4000 yards distant and 600 feet in height, the second somewhat lower and slightly more distant. The road across the plain to the eastward runs between these two hills, over a pass known as Smith's Nek. At the western foot of this Nek is a wood and enclosure generally called Smith's Farm. Both the Lennox and Talana hills are rugged and difficult of access. Between Talana and Impati is a piece of open ground over a mile in width.

Apparently no cavalry picket was pushed out beyond Talana, as Symons wished to keep his small cavalry force fresh for action; but a mounted infantry picket was stationed at a point about two miles to the eastward.

On the evening of the 19th October General Lukas Meyer's troops, to the number of 3500 or 4000, with six guns, mustered for a night march to Talana, and moving steadily to the westward reached the foot of the hill an hour before daybreak. Some of them had come upon the mounted infantry picket, which retired upon Smith's Nek, sending in word to the British camp. The Boers had then pushed on, and before sunrise had crowned both the Talana and Lennox hills, dragging up some of their guns with them. They were then in a position to shell the British camp, though at a considerable range.

Symons had not been in the smallest degree

alarmed by the report sent in by the mounted infantry picket. He sent out a small reinforcement; but evidently thinking that he had to do with nothing more than a reconnoitring party, he made no arrangements for a general action, and the brigade stood to arms as usual at 5 A.M., with no knowledge of what had occurred or of the work before it. The parade was soon dismissed. The bulk of the artillery horses and the transport animals moved out to water at some distance from the camp, and the infantry began to fall in for skirmishing drill.

Such was the state of affairs when suddenly, about 5.30 A.M., the sun broke through the mist which had hidden Talana Hill, and, as it lifted, the summit was seen to be covered with men. Almost at the same moment the sound of a gun was heard, and a Boer shell dropped into the camp. Others soon followed. No harm was done, but the surprise was complete.

In such a contingency Symons was at his best, and his orders were instantaneous. For the defence of the camp against an attack from the Impati Hill, one of his four battalions of infantry and a battery of artillery were told off, with a company from each of the other battalions. The cavalry and mounted infantry, under Colonel Möller of the 18th Hussars, were to wait under cover until they received the order to advance, unless Möller saw a good opportunity. With the remainder of the infantry and artillery Talana was at once to be assaulted. By 7 A.M., so

rapid had been the whole of the preparations, the assaulting infantry were all assembled in the bed of the so-called Sand Spruit, a watercourse about a mile from the crest of the enemy's position, and more than that distance from the camp, while the 69th and 13th batteries of artillery had already for the time silenced the enemy's guns.

The infantry then received detailed orders for the actual assault. The Dublin Fusiliers were to form the first line, the King's Royal Rifles in support, the Royal Irish Fusiliers in reserve. Brigadier-General Yule was to command the attack.

By 7.20 A.M. the leading companies emerged from the Sand Spruit, and under a heavy fire from the summit of Talana, as also from the Lennox Hill on their right, pushed forward into the wood and enclosures of Smith's Farm, and eventually reached a line only 550 yards from the crest of Talana. Here, however, they were checked for a time by the front and flank fire poured upon them by the hidden Boers, and in spite of messages from Symons urging an immediate advance, the line remained stationary. It seemed that the attack had spent its force, and that the final rush to the summit was beyond the powers of the outnumbered troops.

This was more than Symons could stand, and at nine o'clock, in spite of all remonstrances, he rode forward into the wood. There he dismounted, and pressing in among the men, urged them on to a fresh effort. It was the last of the many brave acts which had marked his life. Facing the enemy, and encour-

aging all about him by his words and example, he was struck in the stomach by a Boer bullet, and had to leave the fighting line.

Directing Brigadier-General Yule to proceed with the attack, he turned and walked calmly to the rear. Then, meeting his horse, he mounted, and not until he had passed entirely through the troops was any sign of suffering allowed to escape him. At the station of the Bearer Company he dismounted, and was carried to the dressing-station in a dhoolie. Five minutes later, at 9.35 A.M., the surgeon pronounced his wound to be fatal, and the news was telegraphed to Ladysmith.[1]

It was a great loss, but Symons had succeeded in concealing his wound from the men, and in response to his appeals they pushed forward from the cover of the wood, the King's Royal Rifles leading. Then followed a long and severe contest for the crest of the Talana Hill, our people gaining ground slowly and being often checked, but moving gradually forward until, soon after one o'clock, there was a final rush, and Talana was in their hands. The Boers on the Lennox Hill seeing this gave way also, and before two o'clock the whole of Lukas Meyer's force was streaming away in full flight across the plain to the eastward.

Then followed one of those incidents which have so often saved a beaten force from destruction. As the victorious infantry looked down from the heights they had stormed upon a plain covered with fugitives, they expected to see our cavalry sweeping over

[1] Official History of the War.



R. Stanley & Co.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR W. PENN SYMONS, K.C.B.

it in fierce pursuit. But no cavalry were visible. The artillery were soon on the summit of Smith's Nek, and in a position to shell the flying enemy with deadly effect; but to the amazement of all, the guns remained silent. At the critical moment some message proposing an armistice to collect the wounded had been received from the Boers, and the artillery commander, in doubt whether the action was to continue, held his fire. The Boers, all mounted men, retreated rapidly, and were soon out of effective range, escaping the heavy loss which ought to have been inflicted upon them. Though the victory had been won, the fruits of it, in so far as the guns could ensure them, had been thrown away.

In the meantime what had become of the cavalry? They had won, and lost, such an opportunity as rarely fell to our mounted men in the course of this war. As the attack on Talana developed and the Boers began to show signs of wavering, which some of them did very early in the day, the cavalry, consisting apparently of three squadrons of the 18th Hussars, with some mounted infantry, had moved round the Boer right and taken up a position to the right rear of the Talana Hill, where they were ideally placed. The enemy's line of retreat lay at their mercy, and behind the hill stood herds of saddled ponies, whose masters were holding the summit against our attacking infantry. If our troopers had been kept together ready for a charge across the line of retreat when the Boers came down the hill, as was done next day at Elandslaagte, or had even opened fire on, and shot or

stampeded, the Boer ponies, the results must have been very serious to the enemy. But neither of these courses was taken. Colonel Möller, who no doubt, like most of our people at that time, underrated the fighting capacity of the Boers, seems to have thought that he could safely divide his force and deal with both sections of the enemy at the same time. He therefore detached Major Knox, first with one squadron, and then with two squadrons and a troop, to the rear of Lennox Hill, while he himself boldly took up a position with the remainder, something over two hundred men, astride of the Boer line of retreat from Talana, in the open plain. Here he was attacked by the enemy, whose retreating swarms were not to be stopped by so small a party, and was himself forced to seek safety in a rapid retirement. Knox, also pressed, extricated himself; but Möller, trying to get round to the camp by a long detour to the north, was cut off by Boers descending from Impati, and, being eventually surrounded by a force with guns, was forced to surrender. Nine officers and over two hundred men laid down their arms.

This, the first serious surrender of the war, was a deplorable ending to a day which, in spite of the initial surprise, had at one time seemed likely to end in a brilliant success for the British arms.

As it was, Talana can hardly be regarded as a satisfying victory. It is true that the confidence of Symons in the tactical superiority of British troops over Boers had in a sense been demonstrated. Our

guns and infantry had attacked and put to flight a force exceeding them in numbers, and holding a strong position, another body of the enemy being held off while the defeat was inflicted. And with any ordinary good fortune, the loss sustained by the defeated force would have been much heavier than it was. It is true also that the confidence of the Boers was much shaken by the way in which Talana was stormed, and that Lukas Meyer's men were demoralised by their failure to hold their own against the despised "Ruinek." But the fact remains that including Möller's men, our losses were to the Boer losses in the proportion of more than three to one, and that the defeat of Lukas Meyer's force, though unquestionable, was not crushing. The first of the four actions fought by White's troops in the open had not resulted in decisive success.

As for the ill-fated commander, it is easy to criticise his temperament and his dispositions. He was perhaps too confident in the superior fighting power of British soldiers, too eager for a chance of showing it, not careful enough in taking all possible precautions against a reverse. But he was an accomplished and skilful soldier, as well as a brave and forward one; and it will be a bad day for the British army if ever men of his stamp become fewer. With a little better fortune he might have risen, deservedly, to a high place in the ranks of our famous fighting men.

CHAPTER VIII.

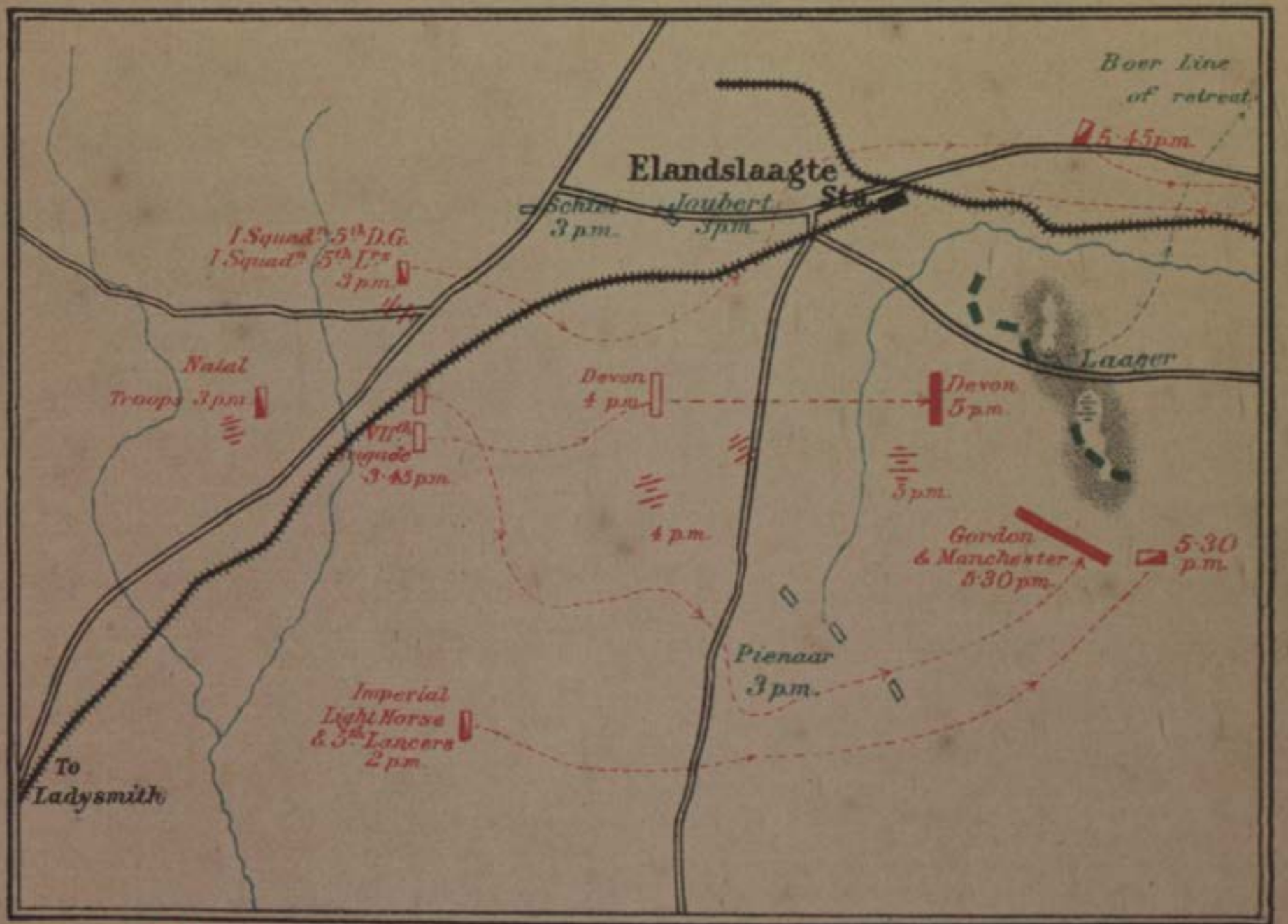
ELANDSLAAGTE.

DURING the 19th October, while Symons was awaiting in his camp near Dundee the approach of the Boer forces from north, east, and west, Sir George White was occupied in a close inspection of the line of defence selected for Ladysmith. It was a long line, about fourteen miles in extent, and required very careful examination in order that every weak point might be detected and rectified before it came to be tried by the enemy's fire. White rode round the defences, looking into everything personally, and came to the conclusion that whatever was possible had been done to make the place secure. He had no more intention now than before of remaining in Ladysmith if he could find or make an opportunity of striking out at any part of the enemy's forces; but it was most important that if the enemy proved to be too strong for him in the field, he should have a thoroughly prepared position upon which he could fall back.

In the meantime, as explained in Chapter VII.,

ELANDSLAAGTE

Oct. 21st 1899.



British

Infantry Preliminary phases

" extended in position

Cavalry

Artillery

W. & A.K. Johnston, Limited, Edinburgh & London.

Scale One inch = 2 miles

0 1 2 M.

Boers

Temporary positions

Extended in position

Artillery

the right column of the Transvaal advance, or a portion of it, had pushed down over the Biggarsberg, and in the course of the day captured the station of Elandslaagte. At daybreak on the 20th October, General Kock, the commander of the column, was himself in Elandslaagte with the whole of his force; and, though perhaps too far off to join in the combined attack upon Symons, was well placed for harassing his retreat, if he should be defeated, and for opposing any attempt at an advance from Ladysmith to support him.

White's file of telegrams does not show exactly when he received news of the fall of Elandslaagte, but it was some time during the 19th October; and on the morning of the 20th, information of the attack on Talana having meanwhile come in, a force moved out of Ladysmith to ascertain the situation, and if possible to reopen direct communication with Dundee. Major-General French[1] had arrived from the south at daybreak, and he was selected to command the force, which consisted of some mounted troops and a battery of artillery. An infantry brigade under Colonel Ian Hamilton followed in support. French got far enough to come in sight of a portion of the enemy, but in the meantime the Free State Boers to the west assumed an attitude so threatening that White, fearing an attack on Ladysmith, thought it necessary to recall French and Hamilton, who returned the same evening.

[1] Now Field-Marshal Sir John French, commanding the British Expeditionary Force in Flanders.

But White had now received news of the victory at Talana, which, as at first reported, seemed to have been more decisive than it really was; and, his mind relieved about Dundee, he determined to strike swiftly at the Boer force on the railway line, hoping perhaps to catch them between two fires. Early on the morning of the 21st October, therefore, French once more moved out of Ladysmith, and by 7 A.M. he was in touch with the enemy at Elandslaagte.

He had with him five squadrons of that fine corps the Imperial Light Horse, under Colonel Scott Chisholme, and the Natal Volunteer Field Battery, while half a battalion of the Manchester Regiment, and Railway and Telegraph Companies of Royal Engineers, came on by train.

Some sharp skirmishing followed, in the course of which it was found that the enemy's guns outranged ours by fully five hundred yards; and towards noon French came to the conclusion that he had before him about a thousand men in a prepared position. To turn them out and beat them decisively a respectable force of infantry and artillery was indispensable. French therefore asked for three battalions and two batteries, with some more cavalry. White answered at once that the enemy must be beaten and driven off, and that reinforcements would be sent. He also determined to ride out to Elandslaagte himself and supervise the operations, leaving his Chief of the Staff, Sir Archibald Hunter, in charge of Ladysmith. The force sent out—part of

which had already started—consisted of a squadron of the 5th Lancers, one of the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 21st and 42nd batteries of Field Artillery, seven companies of the 1st Battalion Devonshire Regiment, under Major Park, and five companies of the 2nd Battalion Gordon Highlanders, under Colonel Dick-Cunyngham. Including French's original force the whole amounted to about 3500 men.

The Boers had selected for their position some rugged heights to the south-west of Elandslaagte, nearly at right angles to the railway line, and rising to about 300 feet above the plain. It was a well-chosen position, offering excellent cover for the defenders, and necessitating the advance of an attacking force over open and difficult ground.

The reinforcements were all up by three o'clock, and as few hours of daylight remained, French determined to assault the position at once. Indeed he had begun, before the reinforcements arrived, to push his men forward, in order to hold the enemy and clear the ground for the infantry attack. From behind the Boer position a heavy thunderstorm was coming up, and before the infantry was ready for the final assault the light was beginning to fail.

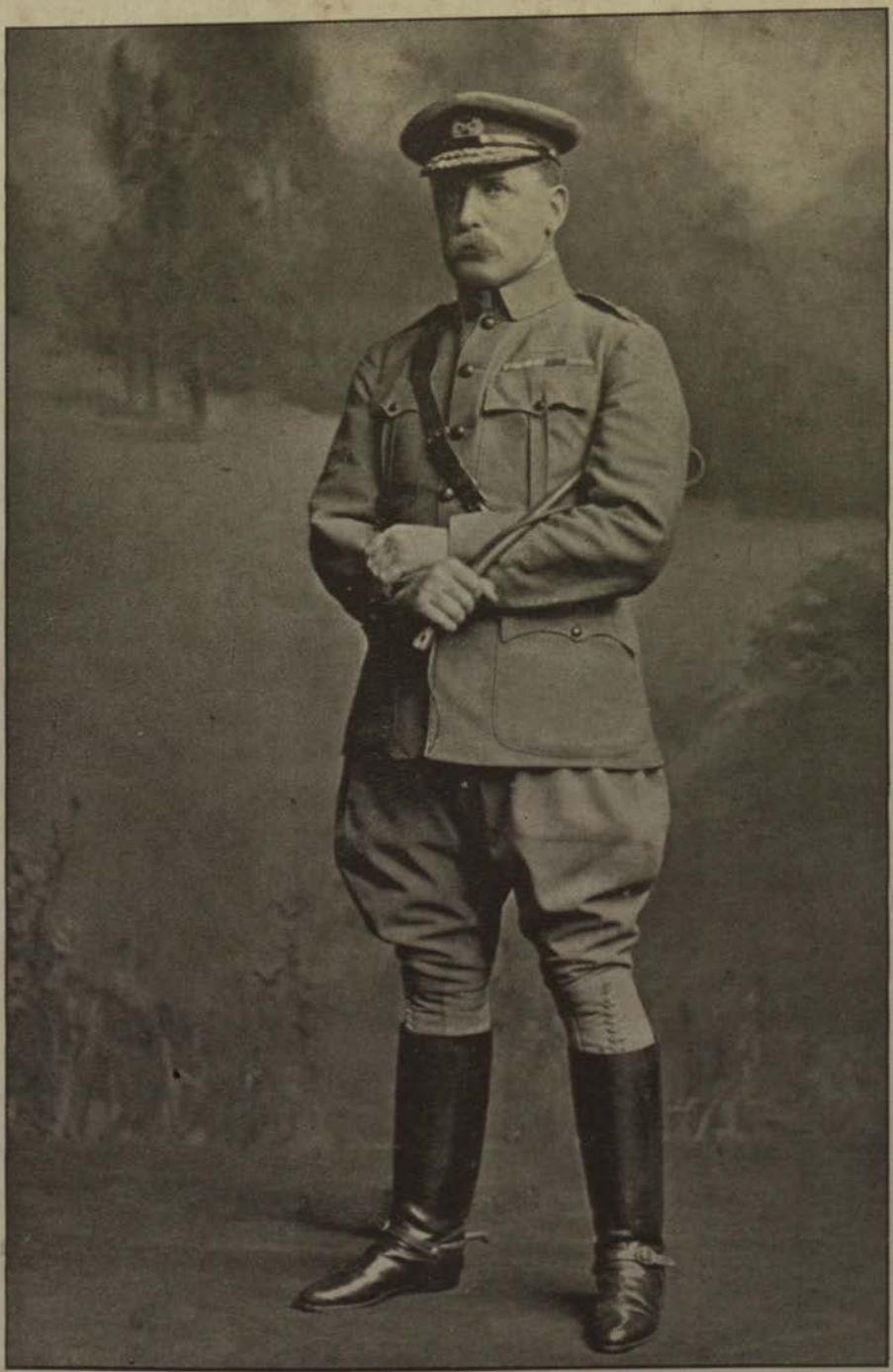
The arrangements for the infantry attack were as follows: the Devons under Major Park were to advance across the open in extended order straight upon the Boer front, while the half-battalion of Manchesters, with the Gordons in support, were to turn the enemy's left flank. Arrived within effective rifle range the Devons were to con-

tent themselves with holding the enemy while the flanking movement developed. The artillery was to support the infantry, moving in to closer range as the action progressed.

Of the mounted men some moved on the right of the flanking attack, while Major St J. C. Gore of the 5th Dragoon Guards, with a squadron of his regiment, afterwards reinforced by a squadron of the 5th Lancers, moved round the enemy's right, and concealing his men in a position upon their right rear, awaited the development of the infantry attack, ready to fall upon the Boers directly they broke.

Shortly before four o'clock, just as the final arrangements for the attack had been carried out, Sir George White arrived on the ground, having ridden out from Ladysmith. Satisfied that the dispositions made were thoroughly good, he left the control of the fight entirely in French's hands, and remained only to watch the result. It was an unselfish thing to do. A jealous or fussy man would have taken command. He had the great pleasure of seeing an admirably planned attack carried out with entire success, and the enemy driven away to the northward in headlong rout with the loss of nearly half their numbers.

There was hard fighting, and considerable loss on the British side, before the Boer position was finally stormed, for some of the enemy stood well, and subjected the advancing troops to a severe fire. But before six o'clock, in a storm of rain, and when



MAJOR-GENERAL (NOW FIELD-MARSHAL) SIR JOHN FRENCH, K.C.B.

By kind permission of Captain C. S. Goldman, M.P., author of 'With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa.'

it was nearly dark, Devons and Gordons and Manchesters, with the dismounted troopers of the Imperial Light Horse, had swept the last remnants of the Boers from the crest of the hills they had held; their two guns were in the hands of our men, and the Boer General himself was a captive. Best of all, the cavalry had seized their opportunity, and falling upon the beaten enemy in the gathering darkness, had ridden through them twice, using lance and sabre with deadly effect, and taking many prisoners.

Elandslaagte, though not an action on a large scale, was a real victory, marred by no such untoward incidents as had deprived of its results the previous day's fighting at Talana Hill. Instead of retiring, discomfited but not crushed, from a battlefield where they had inflicted greater loss than they had sustained, the fugitives this time had galloped headlong to the Boer headquarters many miles away, spreading dreadful tales of the slaughter inflicted by the British Lancers, and reporting the complete destruction of their "commandos." There is no doubt that the effect of the fight on the spirit of the hitherto confident Boers was very great. It is true that as compared with Talana Hill the task set to our people at Elandslaagte had been less arduous. They were superior in numbers to their enemy, and the Boer position was perhaps less strong. Yet the storming of the "kopjes" at Elandslaagte was no light thing. In the course of it we lost thirty-five officers killed and wounded, and over two hundred men.

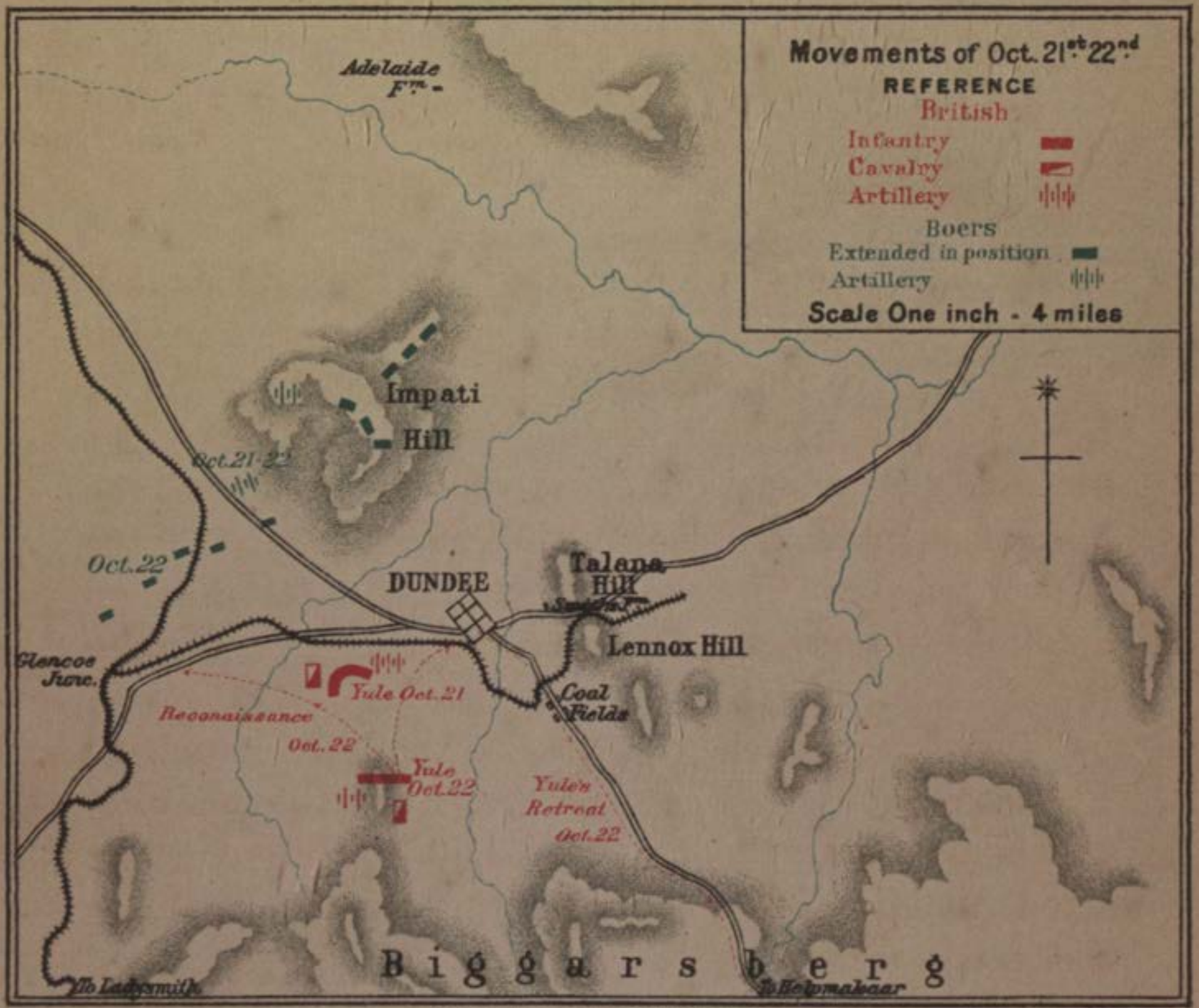
Much has been written about these two actions, and naturally, because they came at the beginning of the war and attracted much attention. There is one critic of the operations of the Natal force at this time who cannot be accused of partiality, the famous American writer, Admiral Mahan. Discussing the course of the war in 1901, while it was still in progress, and without any personal knowledge of the actors in it, he wrote as follows :—

> Duly to appreciate the merits and the results of these two successive days of fighting, at Talana and at Elandslaagte, it must be remembered that the British in a general sense, and at Dundee locally as well, were upon the defensive, and that the Boer movements were each a part of one general plan directed, and most properly, to overwhelm and destroy the detachments, Dundee and Ladysmith, in detail; they together being rightly considered one fraction of the enemy's whole force, present or hurrying over sea. So regarded, the vigour with which the British took the initiative, assumed the offensive, themselves in turn attacking in detail, and severely punishing, the separate factors of the enemy's combination, is worthy of great praise. Sir Penn Symons is perhaps entitled to the greater meed, because to him fell, with the greater burden, the greater opportunity, to which he proved not unequal.

And Mahan speaks also of these two actions as "the brilliant antecedent campaign, the offensive right and left strokes." [1]

[1] 'The Story of the War in South Africa.'

TALANA



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CHAPTER IX.

THE RETIREMENT FROM DUNDEE.

When on the evening of the 20th October Brigadier-General Yule marched back his weary troops from Talana Hill to the camp at Dundee, in a storm of rain, he was far from feeling triumphant over the success of the day. He did not yet know of the mishap which had befallen Möller's cavalry, and the left or eastern wing of the Boer advance had no doubt been driven off; but their centre had been threatening him all day from the Impati Hill, and he knew that their right held the railway about Elandslaagte. He had never liked the position at Dundee, and though the enemy on Impati had acted timidly, instead of making a bold attack on the camp while he was away at Talana, he could not tell what strength they might show next day. It was believed that they had heavy guns against which his field pieces would be unable to hold their own. He was in bad health, moreover, and unfit for much exposure to the prevailing cold and rain.

Nevertheless he was reluctant to abandon Dundee,

for with a superior enemy about him, and the railway gone, this meant the abandonment of wounded and stores, and of the collieries on which Natal depended. Next morning therefore, the 21st October, Yule set to work to find a fresh defensive position beyond the range of bombardment from Impati, and in the course of the afternoon he hoped that he had done so. He was quickly undeceived, for before his troops had been an hour in their new lines shells from heavy guns began to fall among them, causing some casualties, and when the British guns endeavoured to reply it was found that they could not get within a mile of the enemy's pieces. The position was evidently untenable for long, but until nightfall it was held without severe loss, and then the enemy's fire slackened and ceased.

In the course of the afternoon Yule had telegraphed to Ladysmith describing the situation, and asking for reinforcements. He was told in reply that Sir George White was at Elandslaagte, where the Ladysmith troops were in action, and that the request for reinforcements would be submitted to him; but the tone of the reply was not encouraging, and Yule rode out for the second time, in heavy rain, to try whether he could find ground to the southward out of range of the heavy guns. During the night and the early morning of the 22nd October the troops and transport were withdrawn to a fresh position some two miles distant.

There, two or three hours after their arrival, Yule received news of the victory at Elandslaagte the day before; and hoping that he might be able to cut off

some of the beaten enemy, he set his force in motion again and marched boldly on Glencoe junction, though this brought his force once more under the guns on Impati. He did not suffer much from their fire, for heavy mist soon settled down upon the mountain, and concealed his movements from the enemy's gunners; but it was ascertained that some of the Boers from Impati had now occupied in strength the low hills about Glencoe, and that there were no fugitives from Elandslaagte to cut off. Yule therefore marched his men back to their morning's camp, where they arrived early in the afternoon. The soldierly attempt to co-operate with the troops at Elandslaagte had proved unavailing.

Yule now had to make up his mind with regard to the possibility of holding Dundee, and having received no further reply to his request for reinforcements he came to the reluctant conclusion that the enemy's superiority in numbers and artillery precluded the hope of a successful attack. He decided, therefore, that his best course was to retire on Ladysmith, while retirement was still possible, and he was on the point of informing Sir George White of this decision when he received White's reply, which put an end to all further doubt. It ran as follows:—

> I cannot reinforce you without sacrificing Ladysmith and the Colony behind. You must try and fall back on Ladysmith. I will do what I may to help you when nearer.

It was evident, the enemy being where he was, that the only chance of a successful retreat was by the

Dundee-Helpmakaar road, lying some ten miles to the east of the railway, and reaching Ladysmith from that side. To gain the Helpmakaar road, or at all events to lay in a stock of supplies for the march, the retreating force had in the first instance to make its way back to the old camp of the 19th October, where nothing was now standing but the hospital tents, and thence to turn sharp to the southward. The intention was not to march by Helpmakaar itself, which would involve a long and useless detour, but to follow the Dundee-Helpmakaar road so long as it lay about parallel to the railway, and then diverging to the right at Beith, to keep parallel to the railway, and, crossing the Waschbank river, to make Ladysmith by a road which cut off a large part of the distance. It was a risky march, for several serious obstacles, among them the eastern part of the Biggarsberg range, lay across the route; and the enemy, if in possession of the railway line, might at any moment strike the right of the column, while the forces of Lukas Meyer and Erasmus would presumably follow up the retreating troops with the utmost speed, a speed much greater than that of marching infantry. There was nothing else to be done, but it was an anxious operation, and evidently the first essential of success was to march at once, and gain a long start during the night of the 22nd October.

This was accomplished. Sir Frederick Maurice's 'History of the War in South Africa' describes in the following words the critical night march:—

No sooner had darkness fallen than Major Wickham, of the Indian Commissariat, taking with him thirty-three waggons guarded by two companies of the Leicestershire Regiment, left the hill and moved with great precaution into the deserted camp. The convoy performed its short but dangerous journey without attracting the attention of the enemy, and the waggons, after being quickly loaded with as many stores as the darkness, the confusion of the levelled tents, and limited time made possible, were drawn up on the outskirts to await the passage of the column. At 9 P.M. the whole force fell in. The night was fine but intensely dark, and the units had some difficulty in reaching their stations in the carefully arranged order of march. At 9.30 P.M., all being ready, the column, guided by Colonel Dartnell,[1] went quietly down the mountain-side towards Dundee, the southern boundary of which it was necessary to skirt to gain the Helpmakaar road. By 11.15 P.M. the last company was clear of the mountain, and, striking the track to Dundee at the foot of Indumeni, the troops passed close to the bivouac ground of the 21st October. Outside the town Major Wickham's convoy stood waiting, and when, at the right moment, the signal was given, the above-mentioned waggons fell into their place in the line of march. The pace was rapid, despite the impenetrable gloom. Skirting Dundee, the route turned sharply south-east, around the corner of the Helpmakaar road. On the edge of the town the precaution was taken to cut the telegraph wire to Greytown. By 4.30 A.M., October 23rd, the leading files, having traversed safely the defile of Blesbok-laagte, had made good twelve miles of the road to Helpmakaar, fourteen miles from the starting-point.

This excellent piece of night work, largely due to the local knowledge and energy of Colonel Dartnell,

[1] Chief of the Natal Mounted Police, afterwards Brigadier-General Sir J. G. Dartnell, K.C.B., C.M.G.

but creditable to all concerned, was the salvation of Yule's column. After three or four hours' rest, the troops started again, and by 12.30, "a blazing sun beating upon the treeless downs," they had made about another five miles. Yule's position was still very hazardous, for before him lay "a defile known as Van Tonders Pass, deep and difficult, some six miles in length"; and the troops, fatigued by the hard work they had done during the last three days and nights, badly needed rest. But before their retreat was discovered they had put nearly twenty miles between them and their pursuers, and they had now a fair chance of reaching unmolested the open country beyond the Biggarsberg, where if attacked they would not have to fight under such a disadvantage as in the mountains.

I have said that the well-executed night march was the salvation of the column, but this is perhaps too much to say. What probably contributed quite as much to the success of the difficult retreat was the effect produced upon the enemy by the fight at Talana. The evacuation of Dundee and Yule's retreat became known to Erasmus and Lukas Meyer late on the morning of the 23rd. For a force of Boers, all mounted on hardy ponies, to cover twenty miles between noon and sunset would have been no extraordinary feat. But Lukas Meyer, though ordered to pursue "with a thousand men," marched late and slowly, and failed to overtake the column; while Erasmus did not even start in pursuit until the 24th October, and then marched by the road west of the

railway, where he had no chance of seeing the retreating troops. There can be little doubt that neither of the Boer Generals had any keen desire to come to close quarters with the men who had stormed Talana Hill. If they had wished to do so they had ample time, for Yule's force did not reach Ladysmith until the 26th October. The Boers seem to have been content to let Yule go, and "thank God they were rid of a knave."

The retreat has so often been described that it seems unnecessary to describe it again in detail. Yule got safely through the Van Tonders Pass on the night of the 23rd October. On the morning of the 24th he reached the Waschbank river, and, hearing the sound of heavy firing to the westward, came to the conclusion that White was fighting an action somewhere near the railway line. Though ill and spent with fatigue, Yule rode out with some mounted men and guns to co-operate if possible, but in the afternoon the firing died away, and he returned to camp. On the morning of the 25th he marched again, and, having made another eleven or twelve miles, was preparing to pass the night in camp, when he received orders from Sir George White to effect a junction at once with a column sent out from Ladysmith, and to push on straight without further halt. The night march which followed was a distressing one—for rain came down in torrents, turning the road into a sea of mud, through which the weary troops and transport animals struggled in the darkness. There was much confusion, and morn-

ing found the column terribly exhausted. But it was safe, and White's orders were justified by results, for in spite of the cautious nature of their advance, the Boers under Erasmus had on the 26th reached a point from which, if so disposed, they could have attacked Yule's flank in force, and to quote Sir Frederick Maurice, "only operations from Ladysmith on the largest scale could have extricated him." It was perhaps fortunate for him, and for the whole garrison of Ladysmith, that the night march was made. Every man of the reunited force was soon to be needed.

It may be observed that though Yule's retirement from Dundee was a toilsome operation, the miseries of the troops were not so great as they have been represented. The retiring force did not lose a man or an animal. All the more credit was due to Yule.

During this time White had found little time for letter-writing, but the following is a letter written to his wife on the 23rd October:—

To Lady White.

LADYSMITH, 23*rd Oct.* 99.

Every day brings me new losses, and I can ill spare the men gone. . . .

I was forced by political considerations to leave the Dundee force there, though against my convictions. They are now in full retreat, & have had to abandon their wounded & stores. . . . Johnny Hamilton did splendidly at Elands Laagte on Saturday. It was the most bitterly contested action I was ever in. The Gordons lost 13 officers. . . .

I have just returned from visiting the leading men of the Boer wounded. One man is a splendid fellow, Pretorius.

His brother was killed on Saturday, & he has several wounds. He grasped my hand, & expressed great gratitude for what we had done for him. . . .

I am very tired, & my staff are worse. We start fighting again at 5 to-morrow. By the time you get this fresh troops should have landed, if we can hold our own till then. . . .

He was much worried at this time by urgent requests for troops to garrison the colonial capital, which was supposed to be threatened. The anxiety in Maritzburg was natural, and to the civilian mind a local show of force is always comforting. The comfort is a delusive one, as White knew. He writes on the 25th October :—

I try to point out that we have but one chance, & that is to give me sufficient troops with which to strike out boldly. If they have two or three regiments to guard Maritzburg they will not save it if I am beaten, but they might enable me to give the enemy a hard, or even decisive blow. While I can go out & fight the colony remains unconquered. If I am held in or beaten in the field England will have to reconquer Natal from the sea. The consequences of this would be most lamentable even after the reconquest.

It is necessary now to go back a day or two and describe the fight of the 24th October, to which reference has already been made. It was the third of White's fights in the open, in pursuance of his steady determination to strike a hard blow if possible at the converging forces of the enemy while they were still apart. Talana on the 20th and Elandslaagte on the 21st had been victories, but not decisive victories. White still hoped for something more.

CHAPTER X.

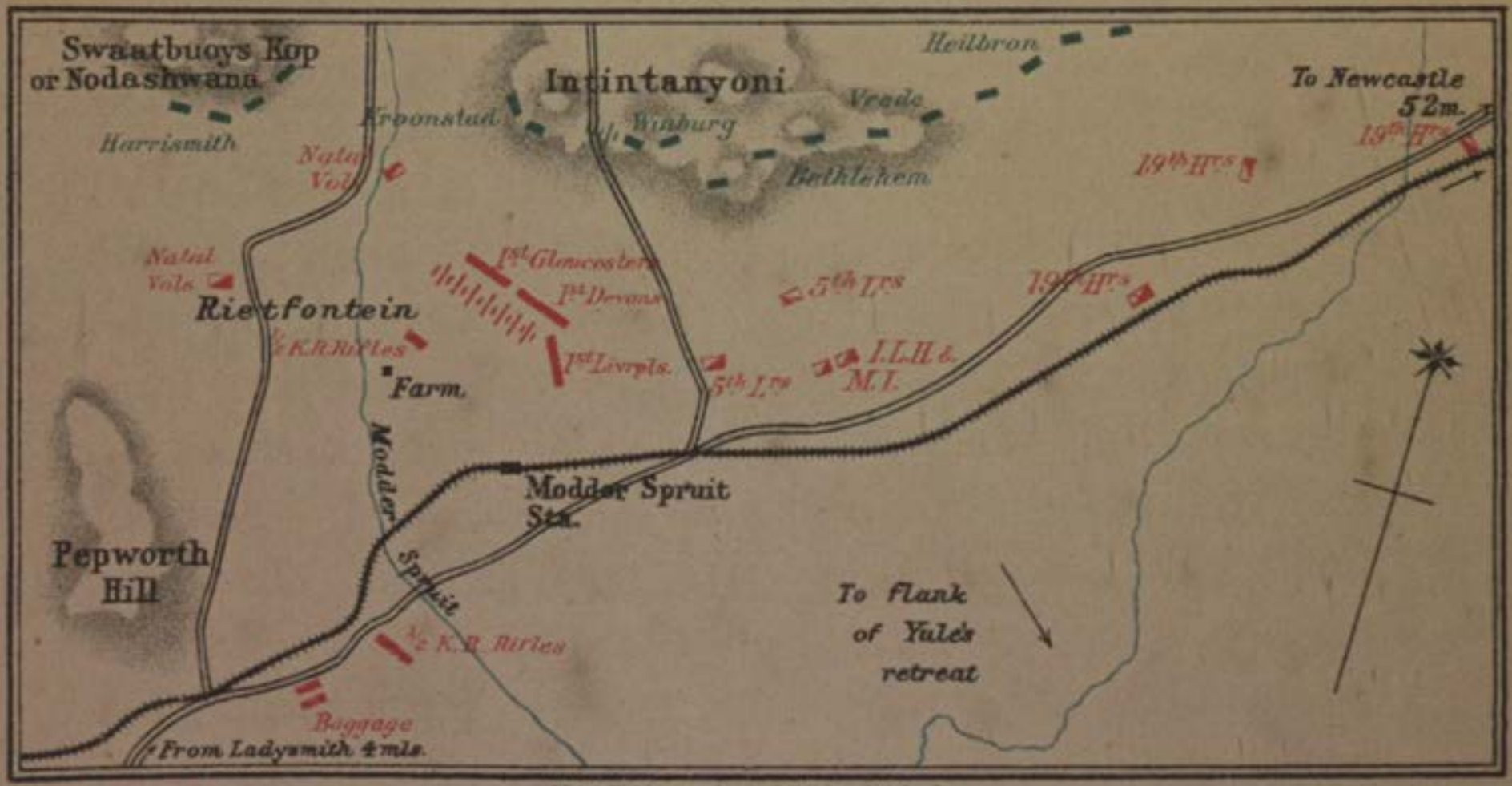
RIETFONTEIN.

On the 23rd October, when White knew that Yule's column had marched out of Dundee and was in full retreat for Ladysmith, his anxiety on their account was naturally great; and it was increased by the news received that day that Free State forces from the west had pushed out to the north of Ladysmith, threatening or occupying a portion of the railway line near Elandslaagte. As will be seen from the map, this movement not only brought the Free State Boers into a position from which they could join hands with the Transvaal Boers if the latter were pushing on straight down the railway line, but also placed them on the right flank of Yule's column. As the Free State forces were estimated at 9000 men, this constituted a serious threat, and called for prompt action.

It had throughout been White's hope that he might be able to strike separately at the two wings of the enemy, defeating either the Transvaal forces or the Free Staters, or both, while they were still out of

RIETFONTEIN

Oct. 24TH 1899.



W. & A. K. Johnston, Limited, Edinburgh & London.

British
Infantry
Cavalry
Artillery

Scale of Miles

1 ½ 0 1 2 M.

Boers
Extended in position
Artillery

touch with each other. He had so far failed to get in a stroke at the Free Staters. The Transvaal Boers had been hit fairly hard both at Talana and Elandslaagte, but the Free Staters had eluded him. Their present action seemed to afford him a possible opportunity, for they were said to be in strength within ten miles or so of Ladysmith, holding the Intintanyoni Hill, close to the railway; and it appeared to him that by moving out with a considerable body of troops to the east of the railway he might not only prevent any attack by the Free Staters upon Yule's line of retreat, but also possibly deal them a severe blow. His main object was to fulfil his promise to Yule, "I will do what I may to help you when nearer," for the safe retirement of the Dundee column, and the consequent addition of 4000 men to his own force in Ladysmith, were matters of the first importance; but he did not lose sight of the chance that while covering Yule's retreat he might also do evil to the Free Staters.

On the 24th October, at 5 A.M., White moved out of Ladysmith with a force of over 5000 men, composed of the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, Imperial Light Horse, Natal Mounted Rifles, three batteries of artillery, and four battalions of infantry—namely, the 1st Liverpool, 1st Devon, 1st Gloucestershire, and 2nd King's Royal Rifle Corps. This force comprised about half of White's troops in Ladysmith, and was the largest body of men yet brought against the Boers in the field.

It had advanced nearly six miles, covered by a

screen of mounted men, when it came into touch with the enemy, who were found to be holding a line of rugged heights, some six miles in length, lying almost parallel to the railway and about two miles to the north-west of it. The centre of this line was formed by Intintanyoni, rising some four hundred feet above the railway, and was flanked to right and left by other considerable hills covered with boulders and grass. Between the Boer position and the railway was a low ridge, on which lay the farm house of Rietfontein. From the crest of this ridge the ground sloped gently down towards Intintanyoni, and then rose again steeply, the face of the hill itself being rough and broken. A valley of a thousand yards or more in breadth lay between the two crests. The Boers in position numbered 6000 men, under command of General Cronje. In rear of their fighting position lay their "laagers" or field bases, with their tents, ammunition, and supplies, while small parties of the enemy were thrown out in advance of the fighting position along the Rietfontein ridge and other low hills.

It was with these advanced detachments that our people first came into conflict, the mounted troops in front being met about 7 A.M. by rifle fire from the heights on their left. They immediately pushed forward across the railway, drove back the small parties annoying them, and extended themselves in a long line facing the Boer position, so as to cover the front and both flanks of the British force. The infantry

and guns then advanced straight on the Boer centre. It may be said at once that no serious effort was made during the day to get round the enemy's flanks and fall upon his laagers, the only way in which a really decisive blow could have been inflicted upon him. The cavalry guarding the British right were, it is true, ordered by White during the course of the action to turn the Boer left if possible and make an attempt on his laagers; but it was found on trial that in order to prevent any such attempt the enemy had occupied a position north of Intintanyoni which was too strong to be passed, or to be taken without heavy loss. The turning movement was therefore given up, and White confined himself to his primary object, the holding of the enemy's force, so as to obviate any attack by the Boers upon the Dundee column.

With this object the British infantry was pushed on towards Rietfontein, and shortly before 8 A.M. two Boer guns on Intintanyoni opened fire upon them. These guns were immediately engaged and silenced by the British artillery, and the infantry advanced in security up the slope of the Rietfontein ridge until they reached the crest. The Gloucester and Liverpool Regiments, which were leading, then came under heavy rifle fire from Intintanyoni and lay down to reply, while the artillery took up positions in support, and began shelling the enemy's line at short range, under 2000 yards. The loss on the British side was not heavy, but the interchange of fire across the valley nevertheless became so hot that the Devonshire

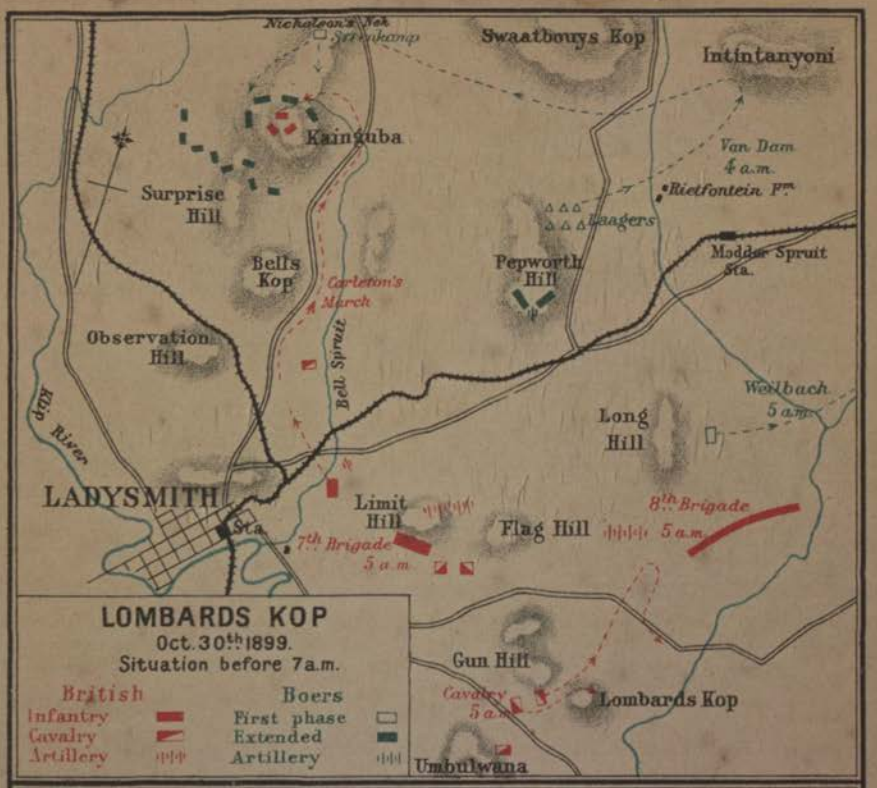
regiment, which had been in support below the crest, was brought up into the firing line to the left of the Gloucesters; half the King's Royal Rifles, which had been left in charge of the baggage, moving up to take the place of the Devons. Before midday the Boers seemed to have had enough of the unequal contest. Their two guns, dominated by the greatly superior artillery of the British, were silent; and their riflemen, whose position was searched from end to end by the shrapnel, had almost ceased firing. Their line was in fact pinned down, and it seemed evident that any attempt on their part to interfere with Yule's retreat was now out of the question. White's main object had been attained.

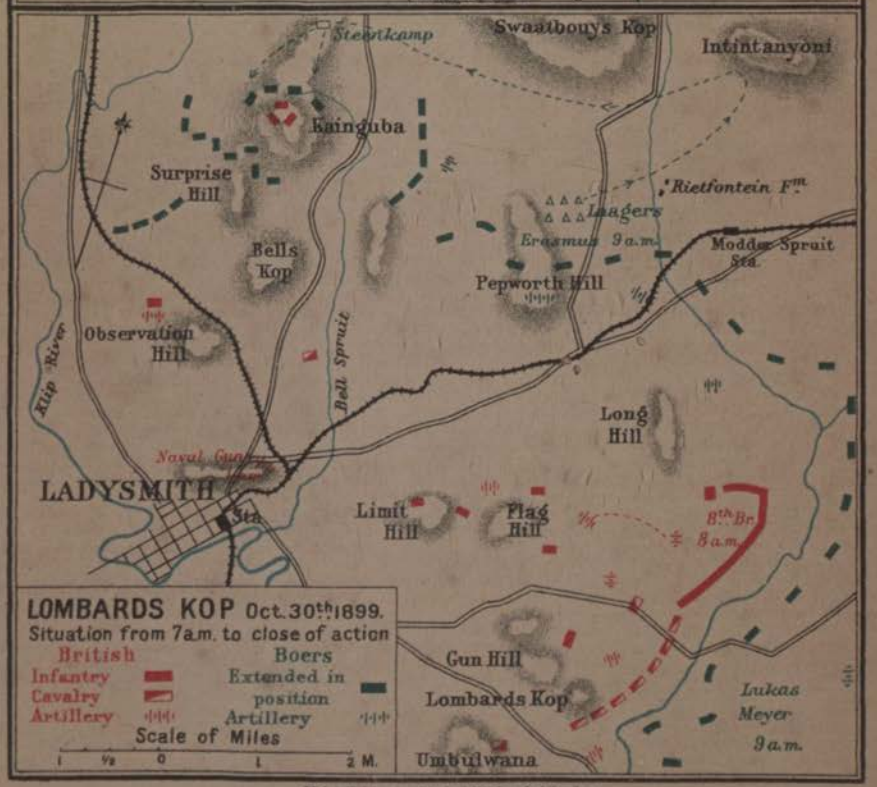
It was at this time, in all probability, though I have been unable to find evidence of the precise hour, that White made his attempt to work his cavalry round their left and get in upon their laagers. However this may be, it was certainly no part of his plan of battle to make a direct frontal attack upon Intintanyoni across the bullet-swept valley; and it must have been with intense surprise and regret that he suddenly found himself committed to something of the kind. No one knows the reason, but, to quote Sir Frederick Maurice:—

> Shortly before midday Colonel E. P. Wilford, commanding the 1st Gloucestershire, taking a company of his battalion and the regimental Maxim gun, dashed out of cover down the open slope as if to assault. Another half company of the battalion moved on ahead to cut a wire fence which obstructed the front.

A squadron of the Imperial Light Horse joined in the attack. It was quickly counter-ordered, but not until the gallant Wilford himself and six men had been killed and about forty wounded, the Boers having at once reopened fire. The incident was doubly unfortunate, not only because of the useless loss, but because the enemy, naturally enough, imagined that they had repulsed or prevented a general assault, and were elated in consequence. They at once began to threaten the British left with an outflanking attack; and though this was soon stopped by the Natal Mounted Rifles, who made a dashing counter-attack, and by the fire of the guns, under which the dry grass upon Intintanyoni and the heights on the Boer right burst into flames, the effect of Wilford's movement was undeniably bad. After an hour or two the Boer fire died down again, and eventually ceased on almost all the line; upon which White, his chief purpose attained, gave the order for a general retirement. It was carried out for the most part with smoothness and ease; and the day's loss, 114 killed and wounded, was not heavy. But the losses of the Free Staters had been even smaller than those of the British, in spite of the preponderating British artillery; and they had never understood White's real object, for they imagined the Dundee column had already got into Ladysmith. They therefore supposed that White had attacked them in force and been beaten off, and they followed up with such vigour the cavalry who were covering the retreat that some of the troopers got back with difficulty. Rietfontein therefore was not a striking

success, for it is doubtful whether in any case the Free Staters would ever have found Yule; and they were certainly encouraged by the apparent inability of the British to make them give ground in the open. All that can be said is that any possible danger to Yule was warded off, and his retreat effectually secured.





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CHAPTER XI.

LOMBARD'S KOP.

For two or three days after the safe arrival of the Dundee column in Ladysmith the troops composing that column, and the transport animals, were in no state for fresh exertions. Though the march from Dundee had not been a very long one—a little over sixty miles—and no opposition had been encountered, yet the column had had six days and nights of trying work, beginning with the hard fight at Talana and ending with the mud and misery of the last night. Men and animals required two or three days of complete rest.

White had no intention of keeping them long unemployed. "I have a fine force now, and will use it," he wrote; but before making another effort to meet and beat in the open the converging Boer forces, he thought it desirable to get the Dundee column thoroughly fit. In the meantime his cavalry under General French were making reconnaissances with the view of finding a favourable opportunity for a blow,

and the Boers were closing in. On the 27th October White writes to his wife :—

The English mail goes to-day, and I must send you one line to say that the enemy is appearing in great numbers on the east & north-east of Ladysmith. I have been receiving reports all night, & before this reaches you there will be important events. I hope we may come well through it. I will try to hit hard, but the difficulty is to get a fair chance of hitting at anything sufficiently definite to mean an important & lasting success. I think it quite possible the postal & telegraphic communication may be cut before long. If so, I hope you will keep up a good heart, but it will all be finished one way or another before this reaches you. The troops have had terrible hard work. My best love to you & all my children. . . .

On the 29th October the long-expected opportunity seemed to have arrived. After Rietfontein the Transvaal Boers had joined hands with the Free Staters, and there was no longer any possibility of decisively beating either of the two forces while they were apart; but they still acted more or less separately, and it was possible that an attack upon one of the two might not immediately be met by a counter-attack on the part of the other. The Free Staters lay to the west and north-west of Ladysmith, the Transvaal men to the east and north-east. According to the information brought in by the cavalry the right of the Transvaal forces had now occupied in large numbers, with guns, two hills marked on the appended map as Long Hill and Pepworth Hill, only three or four miles out of Ladysmith. Behind each of these hills was a large camp or laager. It seemed that if Long Hill and then

Pepworth Hill could be carried, the Transvaal right might be driven in upon its centre, and the whole rolled up to the eastward away from the Free Staters, who would then be isolated.

The fight at Rietfontein had shown that the Boers might guard the laagers by occupying with comparatively small detachments positions which would prevent the British cavalry unaided from getting round to them. It was thought desirable, therefore, while the main British force was preparing for an attack in the morning upon the two hills, that a body of infantry should be sent during the night to push out to the north-west of the enemy's hills, and take up such a position as would not only cover the left flank of the British advance from any action on the part of the Free State Boers, but enable the cavalry to debouch upon some open ground beyond the Transvaal enemy, and complete his discomfiture if the hills should be carried.

In order to gain a decisive success if possible, White determined to employ in the attack practically the whole of his troops, a small number only being left in Ladysmith to guard against a *coup de main* from the westward. It was to be no half measure, but a bold fighting stroke, driven home with all his strength.

White's dispositions were as follows :—

The force, already mentioned, which was to cover the left flank, consisted of the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers and 1st Gloucester, with No. 10 Mountain Battery. It was commanded by Lieut.-Colonel F. R. C.

Carleton. The force was to move out at 10 P.M. on the 29th October, and, marching due north by a watercourse called Bell's Spruit, was to gain the crest of a pass about seven miles from Ladysmith known as Nicholson's Nek, and there establish itself. Nicholson's Nek was the gate by which the cavalry was to issue upon the rear of the Boers, and Carleton was to hold the gate open.

To cover the British right a cavalry brigade under General French, comprising the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, and a Natal regiment commanded by Colonel Royston, was to move out early in the morning, and occupying before dawn some ridges north-east of the point marked on the map as Gun Hill, was to demonstrate against the enemy's left.

Between these two flanking forces the main attacking force was to be formed up in two bodies.

The first of these, the "8th brigade," commanded by Colonel G. G. Grimwood, was to consist of five infantry battalions—namely, the 1st and 2nd King's Royal Rifles, the 1st Leicestershire, the 1st King's (Liverpool), and the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers. Attached to this brigade were to be three batteries of Royal Field Artillery and the Natal Field Battery. The infantry battalions of this command were not in full strength, as nine companies were left behind to hold Ladysmith.

The second body of the main attacking force, the "7th brigade," commanded by Colonel Ian Hamilton, was to consist of four infantry battalions—namely, the 2nd Gordon Highlanders, 1st Devonshire, 1st



Photo by *Duffus Bros., Capetown.*

GENERAL SIR IAN HAMILTON.

Manchester, and 2nd Rifle Brigade. Attached to this force were to be three batteries of Royal Field Artillery and a body of cavalry consisting of the 5th Dragoon Guards, the 18th Hussars, and the Imperial Light Horse, with two companies of mounted infantry.

Grimwood's brigade was to take Long Hill, the artillery of both brigades uniting to clear the way for his infantry, Hamilton's brigade remaining in reserve. Long Hill taken and held, Hamilton in his turn was to advance, with the support of the united artillery, and take Pepworth Hill. That done, his cavalry was to move round by Nicholson's Nek, held by Carleton's force, and fall upon the enemy's rear, thus completing the victory.

Grimwood's brigade moved out shortly after midnight, and an hour before dawn he was in his prescribed position to the south-east of Long Hill. But he then found that he had with him three only of his five battalions, the Liverpools and the Dublin Fusiliers having diverged to the left in the darkness, following some of the artillery, and thus got separated from him. To make matters worse, he found, as day broke, that French's cavalry, which was to have covered his right, was not to be seen. It had remained in and about the points marked on the map as Lombard's Kop and Umbulwana, and Grimwood's right was exposed to attack.

Meanwhile Hamilton, moving out about 4 A.M. to his assigned position at the point marked on the map as Limit Hill, where he was to await the development

of Grimwood's attack on Long Hill, received news that something had gone wrong with Carleton's column on his left. A muleteer of the 10th Mountain Battery came in with the information that during the night march the battery mules had stampeded and broken away. This man's account was confirmed by an officer attached to the Gloucester regiment, and before dawn it gradually became clear that the guns and ammunition of the battery had been wholly or partially lost.

Altogether the situation when day broke was far from satisfactory, and it was soon evident that the projected attack was not to be carried out on the lines laid down. Nevertheless, when the light became strong enough, the British artillery opened fire on Long Hill, and the engagement began. It was then found that the Boer guns had been withdrawn from the hill, and that it was apparently unoccupied, while on the other hand a heavy gun, firing a 96-pound shell, opened from Pepworth Hill, and was soon supported by six guns of smaller calibre, but all outranging the British field guns. These now pushed forward to closer range, and succeeded in temporarily silencing the Boer guns on Pepworth Hill; but other hostile guns opened in different parts of the field, and before long the British batteries had to be sent away in various directions to keep down the Boer fire.

The fact was that Grimwood had been outflanked by the Boer left, and that a sharp attack was being delivered upon his right; and the brigade, swept by rifle and artillery fire, found itself forced to swing

round and form a fresh front to the eastward instead of the north-west. Eventually it was able to join hands with French's cavalry in its right rear, which had vainly tried to push forward as originally intended, and now found itself assailed about Lombard's Kop, the mobile enemy even trying to get round it to the southward. At the same time fresh bodies of Boers moving down from the northward near Pepworth's Hill threatened Grimwood's left.

So the fight went on through the morning, Hamilton's reserve brigade being gradually diminished in numbers by the despatch of cavalry, guns, and infantry to meet demands for reinforcements, until at about eleven o'clock it became clear that all hope of carrying out the plan for a serious offensive blow at the enemy was out of the question. The Boers were held, and unable to advance any further; but they were too strong to be beaten.

Meanwhile Colonel Knox, who had been left in command at Ladysmith, reported that the small force at his disposal was seriously threatened by the Free Staters; and to crown all, White had received trustworthy information that Carleton had lost his battery and was in a critical position near Nicholson's Nek.

There was nothing to be done but to recognise the failure of the offensive scheme, and to retire into Ladysmith. With a sore heart White gave the order, and covered by the fire of the batteries the withdrawal began. At the same time White sent a heliograph message to Carleton: "Retire on Ladysmith as opportunity offers." The ill-fated Carleton was then

holding a boulder-strewn hill five or six miles away to the northward, surrounded by a force of Boer riflemen through which he had no chance of breaking his way. He

> called for signallers to read the message, but so deadly was the fire that three men were wounded in succession, and one man thrice, as they stood by Carleton spelling out the signal.[1]

His own heliograph had been lost in the stampede of the mules, and he could not acknowledge the order. Nor, as he well knew, could he hope to carry it out. Without relief from Ladysmith his force was doomed.

The disengagement and retreat of White's main body was effected with no great difficulty, and without heavy casualties. The British batteries had hard work in covering the retreat, and all of them—especially, perhaps, the 13th and 53rd—went through some moments of peril; but they did their work admirably, and the pursuing enemy were effectually held off. By 2.30 P.M. the troops were all back in their camps. A couple of disabled Maxims had been left behind, with a shattered limber and a store waggon. Otherwise the enemy had not a trophy to show.

While the fight was in progress White received a very useful reinforcement. Six days before, in view of the heavy guns which the Boers were said to be bringing with them from the north, he had, on the suggestion of Sir Henry Rawlinson, asked the Admiral in naval command at the Cape to send him a heavy gun detachment. This detachment, under the command

[1] Sir Frederick Maurice.

of Captain the Honourable Hedworth Lambton, was got ready and sent off with remarkable promptitude, and arrived in Ladysmith at 10 A.M. on the morning of the 30th October. It came into action within two hours, and very soon silenced the Boer guns on Pepworth Hill. The value of the naval guns during the next three months was incalculable.

There remains the story of Carleton's column—a melancholy story. The little force had moved off soon after 11 P.M., under the guidance of Major Adye, an energetic and capable officer of the Intelligence Department, and within two hours had arrived, in spite of the darkness, at the southern extremity of a height called Kainguba. At the northern end of this height, two miles away, was Nicholson's Nek. The advance of the column had not been detected by the enemy, and if it had marched straight on it would probably have reached Nicholson's Nek without trouble. But at this point the march was unfortunately stopped, Carleton being apprehensive lest he should find himself still in the defile when day broke. He decided, therefore, to occupy the Kainguba height, or a portion of it, on his left, and the head of the column was turned towards the steep ascent. It had climbed about two-thirds of the way up when there was a sudden uproar in the darkness, and a herd of animals came thundering down the hillside. What had happened no one knew; but the panic spread along the line of the ascending column, and in a few seconds the whole, or almost the whole, of the battery and transport mules had broken loose

and were galloping madly downhill, dashing aside in all directions the men of the two infantry regiments. When these assembled on the summit of the height, it was found that the mules with the column—over 200 in number—had nearly all disappeared, carrying off with them the reserve of ammunition and pieces of all the guns. The battery was, in fact, no longer in existence. Sending word by a native messenger to inform Sir George White of the mishap, and of the position in which the force now found itself, Carleton proceeded to entrench and to make such arrangements as he could for holding the hill. But without proper tools it was impossible to throw up effective defences, and the cover afforded was very poor, while the ground occupied was open to fire from several directions. Very soon dropping shots from the south-west showed that the presence of the troops had been discovered, and that the enemy was on their flank and rear. At 7 A.M. other bodies of Boers gathered on the heights to the eastward and opened fire from this side also. For some time the attack was not pressed home; but about nine o'clock the enemy began to gather about the northern end of Kainguba, while a force of Free Staters came in on their right, thus surrounding the column. After this fighting went on for some hours, the Boers gradually closing in and inflicting considerable loss, until, about half-past one o'clock, the end suddenly came. At that time Captains Duncan and Fyffe of the Gloucesters, Fyffe being wounded, found themselves isolated with six or eight men, holding a small

native "kraal." The rest of the British force was now in rear of them, behind some rising ground, and the little party appear to have believed that Colonel Carleton had taken his column from the hill, leaving them alone. Hopeless of being able to get away under the fire of several hundred Boer rifles, and feeling that further resistance was vain, they decided to surrender. Taking a towel from a man near him, Duncan tied it to his sword and held it up. In so doing Duncan intended only to surrender the kraal and the few men inside it; but immediately afterwards a bugle somewhere sounded the "Cease fire," and the Boers, imagining that the whole force was concerned, came forward, shouting and waving their hats, towards the point where Carleton was standing. He might still have repudiated the surrender, but he knew that such action on his part would be regarded as treachery, and that, moreover, the result could only be to prolong the fight for a very short time. He therefore himself called for the "Cease fire" to be sounded, and walking out towards the enemy handed his sword to a Boer commandant. 37 officers and 917 men became prisoners of war.

The news of this disaster—for the capture of two British battalions on the field of battle was a real disaster—came to White before the close of the day, and shocked him deeply. Coupled with the failure of his main force to inflict a defeat upon the enemy, it made a vast difference in the military position, not only because of the loss itself, but because it showed that the Boers were much more formidable

than had been hitherto supposed. He knew, too, how serious the effect would be all over the world, especially, perhaps, in India, and his feelings on the evening of the 30th October were intensely bitter.

White was one of the most chivalrous of soldiers, and the last thought in his mind was to cast the blame upon his subordinates. The result of the day's fighting was reported to the War Office in the following words:—

No. 128 A of 30th October. I have to report a disaster to a column sent by me to take a position in the hills to guard the left flank of the troops in their operations to-day. The Royal Irish Fusiliers, the Gloucestershire Regiment, and No. 10 Mountain Battery, were surrounded in the hills, and after heavy losses had to capitulate. Losses not yet ascertained in detail. A man of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, employed as hospital orderly, came in under flag of truce with letter from the medical officer of the column, and asked for assistance to bury dead. I fear there is no doubt of the truth of report. I framed the plan in carrying out which this disaster occurred, and am alone responsible for that plan. No blame whatever attaches to the troops, as the position was untenable.

This telegram, which soon became famous, was generous in the extreme, perhaps Quixotic; for White could not know at the moment how far the surrender might have been due to faulty dispositions on Carleton's part, or other circumstances for which he himself could not fairly be blamed. Yet it probably did more to disarm criticism and enhance his reputation than any more measured report would have done. "Voilà un homme," the French said, with their quick sense of military honour; and "Voilà

un homme" was the general verdict in England and throughout the Empire. If White had sent his message after deliberate calculation of the course most likely to redound to his own advantage, he could not have chosen his words better. But in truth there was no such thought in his mind. His words were the first impulsive expression of his chivalrous nature, and they fully deserved to be received as they were received. Nothing shows more clearly what his real thoughts were than the letter which he wrote to his wife before he slept that night. With her, at least, there could be no question of writing for effect.

To Lady White.

30th October 1899.

It is doubly sad that the blow of my life has fallen upon me on this day.[1] I had promised myself the pleasure of wiring to you "Viretum," the word you wrote on a sheet of paper for me on the way down to Southampton. You kept a copy of it, but it means, "My very dear love to you on this day, & may I see you very soon."

The newspaper boys are now calling in London the terrible disaster that I have only heard of two hours ago. I must tell you the history of it.

I had collected all the troops in the colony of Natal here, & I felt it my duty to the colony to try & hit the Boers so hard that they would not pass Ladysmith & invade the colony south of it. I may tell you in confidence that most of my staff were opposed to going out to fight. They said, "Let us wait until the enemy is nearer, & then let us strike." I felt that this was to allow ourselves to be shut in & unable to strike out where we wished, so I insisted on fighting. I laid

[1] It was the eve of their wedding day.

out a plan to attack a position which was held last night by the enemy with guns. . . . As the attack on this position exposed my left flank to attack from the hills, I consulted a capital officer, Major Adye, who knew every inch of the ground, and he assured me he could, if a party marched at night, take a position which he & they could hold for two days at all events. I detailed the Gloucester Regt., the Royal Irish Fusiliers, & a mountain battery. They started at 11 o'clock last night, & when I got up at half-past three o'clock this morning I was told that there had been some firing during the night march, & that the mules with guns had stampeded. This was an unlucky beginning, but as the Boers hate night fighting, & Major Adye, who was the guide in the affair, said he could do the advance at night, but not by day, I had adopted that course as the one by which the position could be gained with least loss.

I went out at 4 o'clock in the morning & was fighting all day. The men were tired & done. I think it is certain that my plans were betrayed to the enemy, as the position I had intended to burst upon at daylight had been evacuated in the night. They must have heard our plans. We were then attacked by the Boers & forced into a fight that had not been planned. I think we hit the Boers harder than they hit us, but they can outflank us & move much more rapidly, as they all ride ponies. I fought on till I saw our men were failing & could not get on, & then I withdrew them quietly. When I got home I visited the hospital & some corps that had had heavy losses, & then came to my quarters to hear that the two regts. I had sent on the separate duty had been surrounded & had to capitulate. It has been a knock-down blow to me, but I felt I had to make an effort, & thought this plan afforded a fair chance of military success.

It was my plan, & I am responsible, & I have said so to the Secretary of State, & I must bear the consequences. I could have shut myself up or even dealt half-hearted blows with perfect safety; but I played a bold game, too bold

a game, & I have lost. I believe every move I made was reported to the Boers. They are brave & very intelligent, & very hard to give a decided beating to.

I think after this venture the men will lose confidence in me, & that I ought to be superseded. It is hard luck, but I have no right to complain. I have had a very difficult time of it. I don't think I can go on soldiering. My mind is too full of this to write about anything else. It is far into the night, but I don't expect to sleep, though I have been up since 3 A.M. The story of the fate of the 2 regiments is too horrible to me to tell you of. The papers will tell it with every detail.

The telegram was sent nevertheless. It ran: "Viretum, but very sad."

White soon found that neither his men nor his country had lost confidence in him. On the day after the fight he received from Lord Lansdowne a message which did more to comfort and help him than perhaps anything else could have done:—

Queen telegraphs to me as follows: "Am much distressed to hear of this sad news. Trust it will not dishearten troops at Ladysmith; feel every confidence in Sir George White, although he naturally takes all blame on himself; am anxiously awaiting further particulars."

And three days later came a second message:—

Queen telegraphs to me as follows: Begins, "The despatch from Sir G. White just sent this morning has been a great relief, and quite clears Sir G. White of blame.—V.R.I." Ends.

These prompt and generous words were the expression of the national feeling. But the fact remained

that in the trial of strength between the two armies in the field the Boers had shown themselves to be the superior force. They had in the course of the day thrown the British upon the defensive, and had inflicted upon White's troops a loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners of more than a tenth of the number engaged. No doubt the mishap to Carleton's column accounted for four-fifths of this loss; but still it was now evident that the British force in Natal could no longer entertain much hope of beating their enemy in the open.

CHAPTER XII.

THE INVESTMENT OF LADYSMITH.

When the night of the 30th October came to an end, White had to decide, and to decide at once, upon his future course of action. The enemy, in numbers about double his own, and very much more mobile, were now all round him except directly to the south, where the railway ran down to Maritzburg and Durban. In a few days at the most, unless he could do something to prevent them, they would certainly close this outlet also. From Ladysmith the line ran for about sixteen miles through a mass of rugged hills. It then crossed, at or near Colenso, the river Tugela, and passed on through comparatively open country for a hundred miles to the colonial capital at Maritzburg, whence it dropped rapidly, winding among rolling hills, to the sea coast at Durban. On the whole line of communications, a hundred and ninety miles, from Ladysmith to Durban, the number of armed men was then small, two or three thousand in all, and there was no prospect of immediate reinforcement on any considerable scale, though some more

local levies might be raised, and in course of time troops might arrive by sea.

Practically the courses open to White were two. He could either remain at Ladysmith, holding his entrenched position there, and striking out whenever the enemy offered him a chance, or, if he acted at once, he could perhaps evacuate Ladysmith and fall back behind the Tugela upon his communications, hoping to find, either on the line of the river or to the south of it, a position which he could defend against superior numbers with a prospect of success.

It need hardly be said that during the fortnight preceding the fight of the 30th October White had considered, as carefully as his many urgent duties allowed, the question what he should do if his offensive operations failed and the enemy proved strong enough to press him back upon Ladysmith. The problem which he had now to solve was therefore not an unexpected one, and White's decision was prompt. Sir Redvers Buller was expected to land at Capetown on the 31st October, and to assume command of the forces in South Africa. On that day White received from him a telegram, of which the following is an extract:—

Please telegraph me accurate description of your views of the situation. I doubt if Boers will ever attack you if entrenched. Hitherto you have gone out to attack them; can you not entrench and wait for events, if not at Ladysmith, then behind Tugela at Colenso? No reinforcements can reach you for at least 14 days. Why not try and play the

game now played by the Boers? The only thing I can do is to send some of the fleet to Durban to protect our base. Let me know if you wish that done.

White replied:—

No. 109 A of 31.10.99. The Boers have established themselves in very strong positions in the hills west, north, and east of Ladysmith. Each man has one or two ponies. They resent intrusion so much that it is impossible to ascertain their numbers. They live on the country, and their mobility gives them great advantages. They say themselves they will attack. Ladysmith is strongly entrenched, but the lines are not continuous, and the perimeter so large that Boers could exercise their usual tactics. Our men want rest from fighting; but I have the greatest confidence in holding Ladysmith for as long as necessary. I could not now withdraw from it. I think it would be politic to send some of the fleet to Durban to keep up public confidence there. . . . Hitherto I have considered the interests of the colony south of this required me to hit out. Yesterday's fighting showed me there were risks and limits to this. I wired Governor yesterday that I would send Dublin Fusiliers to guard bridge at Colenso as best step I could take for protection of colony. I intend to contain as many Boers as possible round Ladysmith, and I believe they will not go south without making an attempt on Ladysmith.

On the same day White telegraphed to the Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely Hutchinson:—

31*st October*.—My intention is to hold Ladysmith, make attacks on the enemy's position whenever possible, and retain the greatest number of the enemy here.

A day or two earlier, but the telegram does not

show the date of despatch, White had telegraphed to Buller :—

Welcome. Have a very strong force in front of me, with many guns. Natal requires earliest reinforcement possible. Troops here very heavily worked, especially cavalry. I will do all my means admit to conquer enemy.[1]

It is clear, therefore, that on the 31st October White had made up his mind to remain in Ladysmith, and had said so. Also that he considered it necessary to send reinforcements to Natal as soon as possible. He did not, therefore, consider his own force sufficient to beat the Boers definitely. Though he would still try to do this, he did not expect to succeed. What he really hoped for was to contain the main body of them until support could arrive.

This was the situation which confronted Buller when he arrived in South Africa to take command of the Army Corps, which, as explained in Chapter I., was to attack and subdue the Boer Republics. The Army Corps had not yet assembled, or indeed begun to arrive in South Africa, and Buller had not yet decided upon his best line of attack. But in the meanwhile he answered White :—

Your 109 of 31st October. I agree that you do best to remain at Ladysmith, though Colenso and line of Tugela River look tempting, but I would suggest for consideration

[1] It seems probable, from Buller's evidence before the Royal Commission on the War, that this telegram was despatched on the 28th October, before the fight of Lombard's Kop, and that Buller, who had arrived at Capetown late on the evening of the 30th, received it on the morning of the 31st.

whether, if you can reduce perimeter of defence, you might not send one Battalion and one Regiment of Cavalry in direction of Albert or York, or even Greytown, or somewhere covering Maritzburg from raid from North-East.

You have a large force of mounted troops now on the left of the Tugela River. Some of them might be better value on the right of that river. It will be at least three solid weeks before I can attempt to reinforce you, and at present I fancy that the best help I can then give you will be to take Bloemfontein. Good luck to you. You must have had some merry fights.

White replied on the 1st of November :—

I have information that a Commando estimated at 2000 men, Free State, with guns, have arrived within a few miles Colenso. I had ordered French with two Cavalry regiments and 400 Mounted Volunteers to try and help, but later information shows that all the roads are strongly held by enemy. I think the Cavalry could not get through without heavy loss, so I have countermanded them. If road clears will send one Cavalry regiment across Tugela. I cannot reduce perimeter without yielding Artillery positions that would make Ladysmith untenable. Their guns are better than our Field guns. Don't ask me to detach another Battalion. The enemy are in great force.

It will be seen, therefore, that White's decision to remain at Ladysmith had the approval of Sir Redvers Buller, and had indeed been suggested by him. For the future there was no further doubt, if there had ever been any doubt, with regard to this point. Lord Roberts afterwards agreed that the decision had been a sound one. But the telegrams which passed between White and Buller do not give in detail White's

reasons for it, and as there was afterwards some discussion on the subject, it seems desirable to let White state those reasons for himself. I quote from his despatch of the 23rd March 1900 the following paragraph:—

It may be well to state here shortly the reasons which governed my choice of this position. Ladysmith is the most important town in Northern Natal, and there was reason to believe that the enemy attached very great and perhaps even undue importance to obtaining possession of it. It was suspected then, and the suspicion has since been confirmed, that the occupation of that town by the Boer forces had been decided on by the disloyal Dutch in both colonies as the signal for a general rising; as, in fact, a material guarantee that the power of the combined Republics was really capable of dealing with any force the British Empire was able to place in the field against them. Our withdrawal would therefore have brought about an insurrection so widespread as to have very materially increased our difficulties. Strategically the town was important as being the junction of the Railways which enter Natal from the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, and until the Republics could gain possession of that junction their necessarily divergent lines of supply and communication prevented their enjoying to the full the advantages of combined action. Tactically the place was already partially prepared for defence, and offered a natural position of some strength; and although the perimeter which must be occupied was very great for the number of troops available, yet it afforded the possibility of maintaining a protracted defence against superior numbers. On the other hand, the mere fact of a retirement behind the Tugela would have had a moral effect at least equal to a serious defeat, and would have involved the abandonment to the enemy of a large town full of an English population, men, women, and children; and of a mass of stores and munitions of war which had been

already collected there before my arrival in South Africa, and had since been increased. The line of the Tugela from the Drakensberg to the Buffalo River is some 80 miles long, and in a dry season such as last November can be crossed on foot almost anywhere. Against an enemy with more than double my numbers, and three times my mobility, I could not hope to maintain such a line with my small force, and any attempt to prevent their turning my flanks could only have resulted in such a weakening of my centre as would have led to its being pierced. Once my flank was turned on the line of the river the enemy would have been nearer Maritzburg than I should have been, and a rapid withdrawal by rail for the defence of the capital would have been inevitable. Even there it would have been impossible to make a prolonged defence without leaving it open to the enemy to occupy the important port of Durban, through which alone supplies and reinforcements could arrive, and for the defence of which another retreat would have become eventually essential; thus abandoning to the enemy the whole Colony of Natal from Lang's Nek to the sea. On the other hand, I was confident of holding out at Ladysmith as long as might be necessary, and I saw clearly that so long as I maintained myself there I could occupy the great mass of the Boer armies and prevent them sending more than small flying columns south of the Tugela, which the British and Colonial forces in my rear, aided by such reinforcements as might shortly be expected, could deal with without much difficulty. Accordingly I turned my whole attention to preparing Ladysmith to stand a prolonged siege.

Such was White's reasoning, and it was certainly borne out by the subsequent course of the war. The Boers never did cross the Tugela in any real force, and those who advocated a retirement from Ladysmith to the river line did not attempt to prove that such

an alternative course would have been practicable and successful. It would certainly have been a risky experiment, and involved serious sacrifices.

I have quoted before some comments upon the situation in Northern Natal by the great American strategist, Mahan. The following is his review of the general situation during the first period of the war, that is, up to the arrival of Sir Redvers Buller in South Africa on the 30th October :—

> Up to the present success had seemed to lie with the Boers, but the appearance was only superficial. Their plan had been well designed, but in execution it had failed; and while the failure is to be laid in part to a certain tardiness and lack of synchronism in their own movements, it was due yet more to the well-judged, energetic, and brilliantly executed movements of Sir George White and Sir Penn Symons, which utilised and completed the dislocation of the enemy's action, and so insured the time necessary for organising defence upon an adequately competent scale.

Mahan goes on to quote an opinion given by Spencer Wilkinson on the 18th October :—

> Sir George White's force is the centre of gravity of the situation. If the Boers cannot defeat it their case is hopeless; if they can crush it they may have hopes of ultimate success.

And Mahan's remark upon this opinion is as follows :—

> The summary was true then and is now. In the preliminary trial of skill and strength the Boers had been worsted.

Mahan was apparently writing not earlier than July 1900, when the issue of the war had been

practically decided. In other parts of his book he discusses at length the decision to hold Ladysmith, and insists upon the soundness of it. His view, the view of an independent critic and trained student of military operations, may be summed up in one sentence :—

> Probably no single incident of the war has been more determinative of final issues than the tenure of Ladysmith.

With that the question whether White acted rightly in remaining at Ladysmith instead of sacrificing the town and attempting a retreat, in the face of a superior enemy flushed with success, to the south of the Tugela, may be left to the judgment of History, if indeed judgment has not long ago been delivered. No one, I think, who has studied the arguments on both sides can have much doubt on the subject.

White might perhaps have added to the reasons for his decision one more, namely, that the left or northern bank of the Tugela in most parts commands the southern bank, a fact the importance of which was afterwards only too clearly shown; but the reasons seem conclusive as they stand.

He had now to justify them by his subsequent action, for it is to be remembered that remaining in Ladysmith was not in itself enough. He had to hold Ladysmith in such a way as to hold the enemy. If, to use his own words, Ladysmith was to be a shield protecting the vitals of Natal, then it must be so used as to attract to itself, and ward off, the enemy's strokes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—FIRST PERIOD.

In pursuance of his plan White at once began to take such measures as were possible to harass the enemy and keep him in fear of attack. During the 31st October and the 1st of November the troops were employed in improving and strengthening the positions White had decided to hold, and a small force consisting of the 2nd Royal Dublin Fusiliers and Natal Field Battery were sent down by rail to Colenso to help in protecting the Tugela bridge. The Boers, on their side, were not idle, and gradually pushed down from their positions on the north, east, and west towards the south, while their heavy guns sent some shells into the town.

On the 2nd November General French, with a strong body of cavalry and a battery of guns, moved out to the southward, to reconnoitre the enemy, and if possible to surprise one of his southern camps. French succeeded in shelling a camp, and forcing the enemy to evacuate it, but could do no more, and returned to Ladysmith. As he arrived a telegram was received

from Sir Redvers Buller desiring that he and his staff should be sent to the Cape, and French started accordingly about noon. His train reached Colenso in safety, but after running the gauntlet of a heavy fire, and immediately afterwards both railway and telegraphic communication were interrupted. At the same time the bombardment of Ladysmith became much more severe, the Boers having mounted several new guns. The siege had fairly begun.

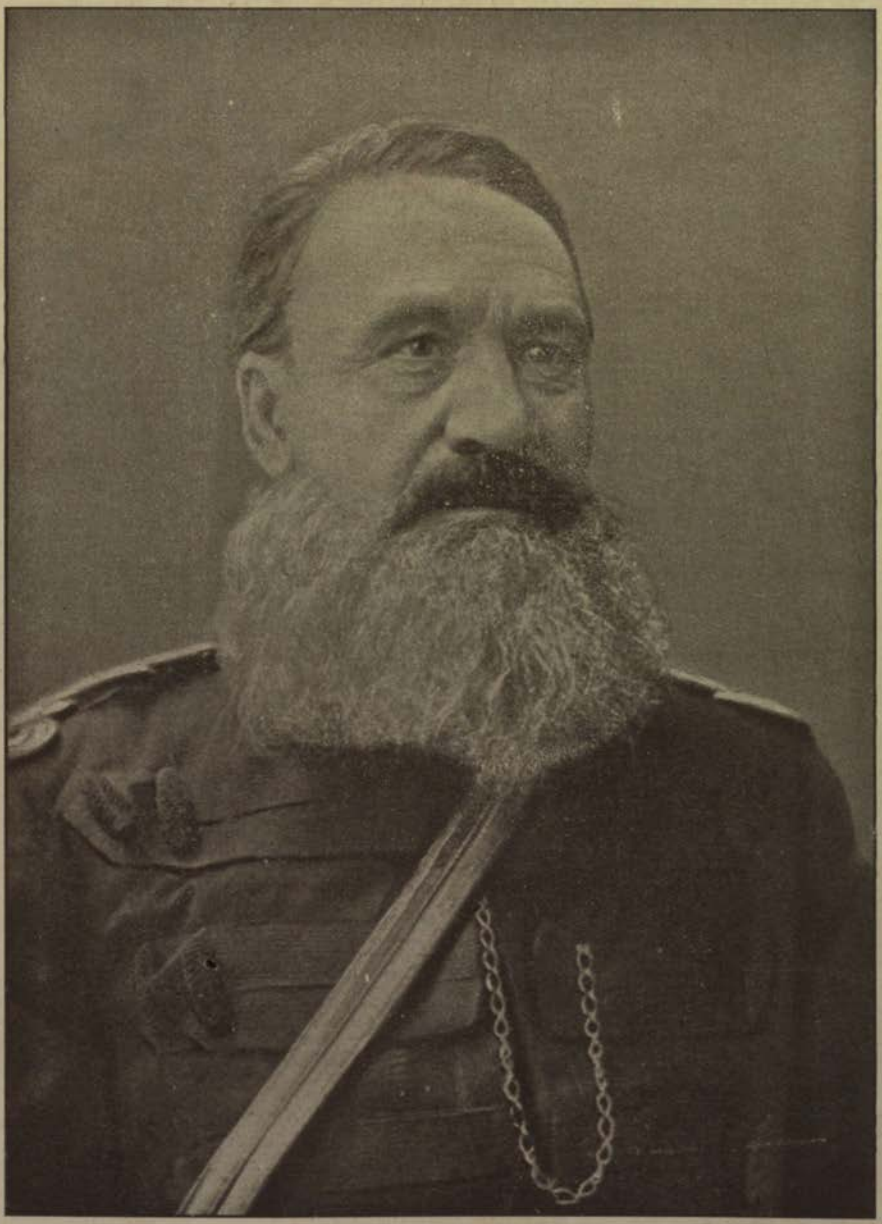
Nevertheless, the troops were not as yet wholly confined to their defences, and on the 3rd November a considerable force of cavalry and artillery again pushed out to the southward, where they had a sharp brush with a body of the enemy, and suffered some thirty casualties. They eventually retired, and the enemy on this side closed in, but without seriously pressing an attack.

The bombardment this day had been heavy, many shells falling in the town, especially about the hospitals; and on the morning of the 4th November White sent out a flag of truce, asking, on the grounds of humanity to sick, wounded, and non-combatants, that the hospitals might be placed outside the town, and that the civil population might be allowed to leave for the south, passing through the enemy's lines. It is pleasant to record, as an instance of the chivalrous conditions under which, on the whole, this war was conducted, that the Boer Commander-in-Chief, General Joubert, at once agreed to let the hospitals be moved out to a point four miles down the railway; and though he refused to let the civil popula-

tion go away altogether, he permitted them to accompany the sick and wounded. Food and all other requisites for the new camp, known as the Intombi Camp, were to be supplied from Ladysmith, one train running each way daily under a flag of truce. The 5th November was a Sunday, and on this day the sick and wounded, with such civilians as chose to go, were sent out to Intombi. It may be added that during the ensuing siege Sunday was generally observed as a day of rest, and by tacit agreement there was no firing on either side, unless for exceptional reasons.

The conditions in Ladysmith were now those which, except for the increasing pressure on the defences and food supply, prevailed to the end of the investment; and it seems desirable to explain, with the help of the accompanying map, what the position was.

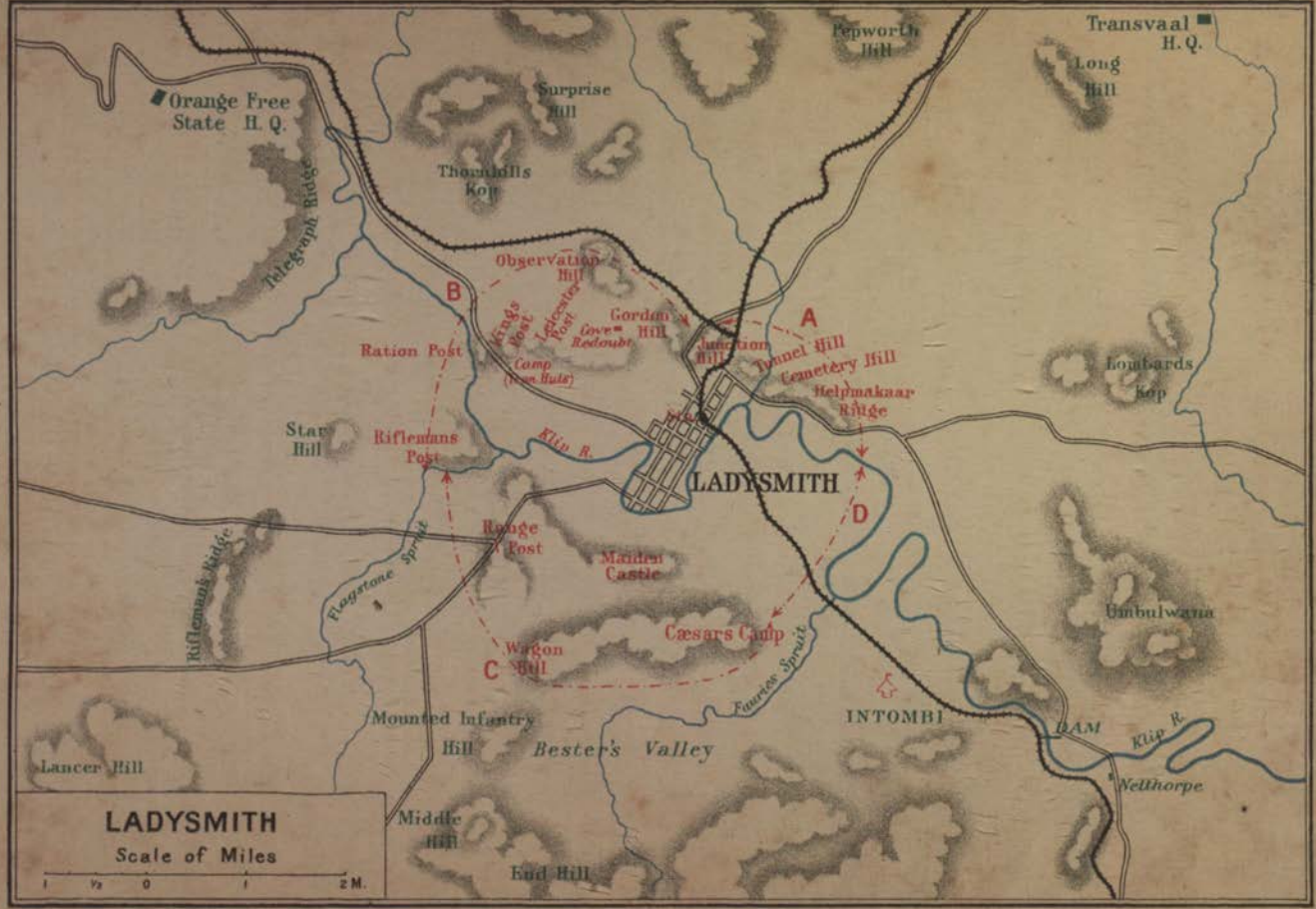
The town itself lay in a hollow, surrounded on all sides by stony barren hills; and the nearest line of these hills, which had the form of a horse-shoe, the open end or heel of the horse-shoe pointing eastward, was occupied by the defending force. The Klip river ran through the town, and afforded a plentiful if not very good water supply. The total perimeter of the horse-shoe line was about fourteen miles, and was held at the beginning by a force of nearly 14,000 men, the civilian inhabitants bringing up the total population to 21,000. White's headquarters were in the town itself, and near at hand, so disposed as to be more or less sheltered from bombardment, lay his reserve, largely consisting of mounted men, who could be used to



C. F. Robertson.

PETRUS JACOBUS JOUBERT,

COMMANDANT-GENERAL AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN REPUBLIC, 1881-1900.



W. & A. K. Johnston, Limited, Edinburgh & London.

reinforce as rapidly as possible any point of the defences which might be attacked.

The Boer position lay along a ring of hills encircling the British line. This ring was thirty miles or more in circumference. Opposite the open end of the British horse-shoe lay a long, flat-topped hill called Bulwana, some 500 feet above the level of the town, and about 7500 yards distant. Any one climbing the rough, boulder-strewn sides of this hill, and standing by the emplacement of the Boer guns, can look down upon the streets and houses of the town, which in the clear dry air of South Africa seem almost within rifle range. Bulwana also commands most parts of the British line of defences. Another of the Boer positions, Pepworth's Hill, to the north, was also within easy range of the town for the heavy guns, though without a clear view of it. To the south of Ladysmith, towards Colenso, a semicircle of peculiarly rough and difficult hills lay between the British position and the river.

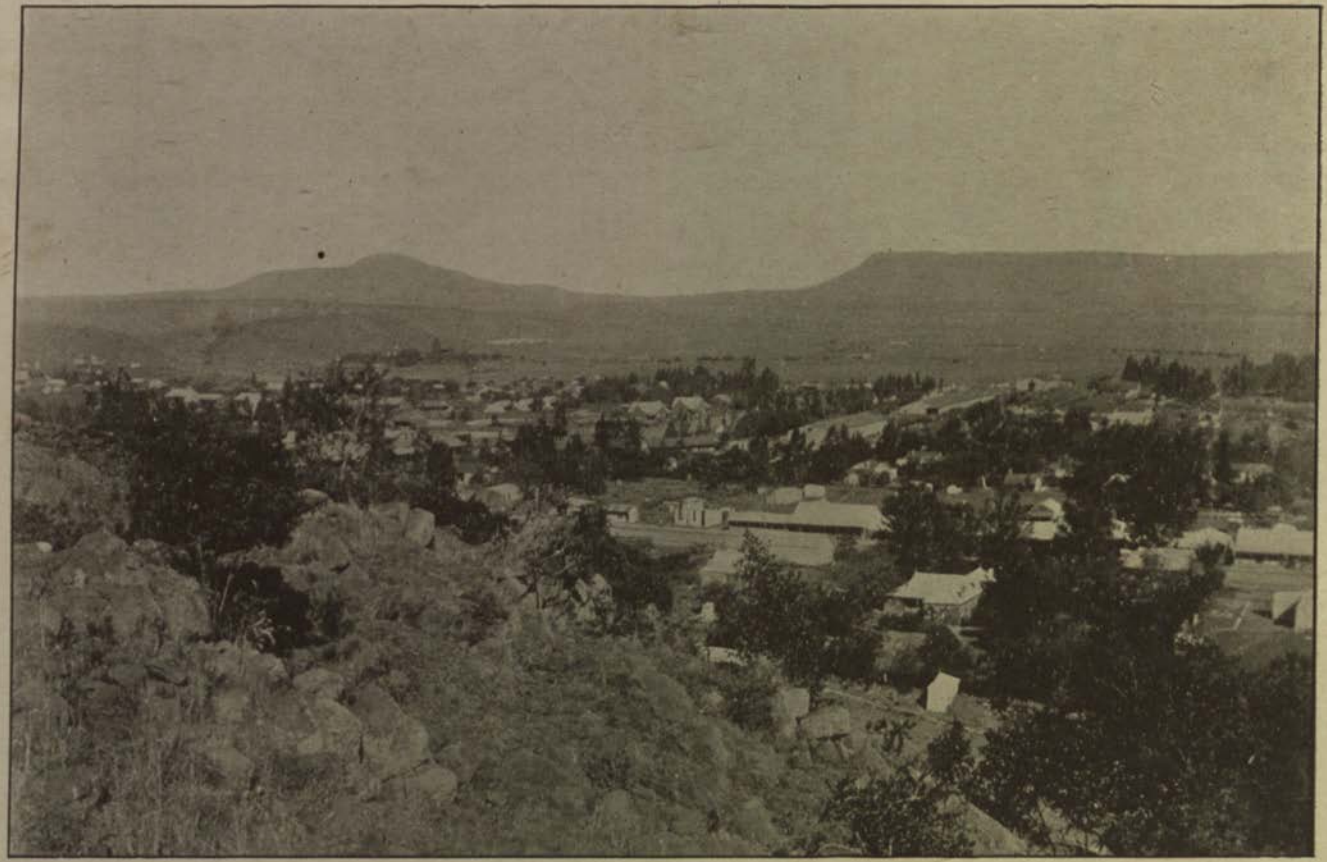
The defences of Ladysmith were for purposes of command divided into four sections, A, B, C, and D. Colonel W. G. Knox, C.B., had charge of A section, which comprised the north-eastern heel-point of the horse-shoe, from Devonshire Post to Gordon Hill. B section, from Gordon Hill round by the north and west to Flagstone Spruit, was under Major-General F. Howard, C.B., C.M.G., A.D.C. Section C, in charge of Colonel Ian Hamilton, C.B., D.S.O., stretched from Flagstone Spruit to the south-east heel-point of the horse-shoe at Cæsar's Camp. Colonel Royston, Commandant of the Natal Mounted Volunteers, held D

section, which consisted of the comparatively flat, open country between the two heel-points of the horse-shoe, facing Bulwana.

Thanks to the wonderful climate of South Africa, the lines of these defences are still clearly to be traced, or were so two years ago. Here and there some of the solid boulder-built shelters have fallen in, and their corrugated-iron roofs lie on the ground; but many remain intact, and show exactly how our hard-pressed men spent their weary days and uneasy nights. The rough lines of "sangars" are almost as they were originally built up.[1] The gun platforms seem fit for use. Even the great shell-hole through the clock tower of the town hall, which has been left unrepaired, remains as a memento of the siege; and up on the summit of Bulwana, by the position of the great Boer gun, "Long Tom," the pits made by the shells of our naval guns seem as fresh as if the shells had been fired a week ago.

During this time, while the Ladysmith garrison was getting accustomed to siege conditions, the Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, Sir Redvers Buller, was studying the situation, and, though his Army Corps was still on the high seas, was evolving a plan of campaign. His position was a difficult one, for away to the north-west the open town of Kimberley, with its diamond mines, was already beleaguered by Boer forces, and the whole frontier of Cape Colony was threatened, while in Natal it was evident that the

[1] The Indian or Persian word "sangar" means a wall of piled stones, what would be called in Cornwall a hedge—from "sang," a stone.



View of Ladysmith, showing Bulwana and Gun Hill.

enemy had the upper hand. Buller's original intention had been to assemble his Army Corps at the Cape, and, keeping it together in a mass, to advance straight upon the capital of the Free State, Bloemfontein. That, he had hoped, would hold out the best chance of dealing the Republics a mortal blow, and would probably be of great assistance to Natal by bringing back the Free State forces for the defence of their own country. But the state of affairs which he found existing on his arrival led him to doubt whether the tempting scheme of a single advance in force was practicable. Owing to the slow formation of his Army Corps he could hardly hope to make a start before the 22nd of December—that is to say, for six or seven weeks—and in the meantime he feared that the worst might happen in Natal, where the Boers had swept the colony down to Ladysmith, and were already pushing small forces across the Tugela. The fact that the bulk of the Transvaal forces, and the best of the Free State forces, were in this quarter, convinced him that they were determined to conquer Natal, and, especially after personal conference with General French, he felt that White was not strong enough to protect the colony unaided. Indeed, White had pressed for reinforcements. With great reluctance, therefore, Buller decided that he must make Natal his main object, and, providing for Cape Colony by means different from those he had intended, go himself to Durban, in order to hold the south of Natal from the sea, and do what he could to relieve the force shut up in Ladysmith. All possible reinforcements were to be

sent to Durban at once, and he would follow when a sufficient force had been collected. By the 10th of November Buller had come to this decision, and the officer in command in Southern Natal was so informed.

To make the situation quite clear, it will be as well to use Buller's own words. In giving his evidence before the Royal Commission he spoke as follows:—

The Government of Natal now of their own motion prepared to evacuate Maritzburg by removing the records, and so forth; and it seemed most probable that the enemy's advance would only be checked by the sea. My private information led me to believe that if they did reach the sea they would receive aid from some European Power, and that they counted upon such aid. In any case, unless they were met and repelled by our forces, they would enjoy undisputed possession of the Garden Colony, the most English province of South Africa, for at least two months; for even supposing that an advance upon Bloemfontein would cause them to withdraw, I could not hope to move in force before the 22nd December, and while I was certain of the gravest political disadvantage from allowing Natal to pass into the hands of the Boers, I was extremely sceptical as to any strategical profit that might be gained from it (*i.e.*, an advance upon Bloemfontein). In fact, from the moment when I knew that the main army of the Transvaal had moved into Natal, I felt convinced that something more than an advance on Bloemfontein would be needed to compel it to retire. A new theatre of operations, 1000 miles distant from that contemplated by the authorities, had been opened by the Boer invasion of South Natal, and there was no escaping from the fact. I therefore decided upon every ground that the deliverance of South Natal must be my first object, combined if possible with the rescue of Sir George White's force for active operations. I should have preferred to have devoted every

possible man of my forces to Natal, for in Natal lay my true objective—the principal force of the enemy. . . . But at the same time I felt it impossible to ignore Kimberley. That town represented to the native the symbol of British power and property in South Africa. . . . Very reluctantly therefore I decided to divide my forces. By the 10th of November I had definitely determined upon my plans.

This book is a memoir of Sir George White, not a history of the South African war, and I do not propose therefore to describe in detail what Buller's plans were. Briefly, he was to send Lord Methuen to relieve Kimberley, after which relief Methuen was to clear the northern districts of Cape Colony from enemies and rebels, and prepare for an advance into the Free State. For the work in Natal, General Clery was appointed, with three brigades drawn from troops now beginning to arrive from England by sea, the first units of the Army Corps. The point of interest for present purposes is that Natal had now become the central point of the war, as many had throughout foreseen that it would do, and that for some months to come the attention of the world was focussed upon the little colony.

It was perhaps, indeed almost certainly, fortunate for England that the original plan of campaign was thus radically changed. The Boer Republics afterwards developed such fighting strength that before they were overcome there were 250,000 British troops in South Africa. If in December 1899 Buller had advanced with a single army corps into the Free State, there is little room to doubt that he would very

soon have found himself in desperate difficulties. The advance proved no easy task even for Lord Roberts, with his greatly increased forces, three or four months later.

Meanwhile, during the early part of November, the investment of Ladysmith became closer, and the bombardment more severe. The garrison was now dependent for any communication with the outer world upon a pigeon post to Durban, and the occasional passage through the enemy's lines of native messengers. The provisions in the shops and stores had been taken over, and the civil residents were on rations like the troops. Many of them had begun to dig out bomb-proof shelters in the banks of the river or other places, where they remained during the day, returning to their homes at night, when the bombardment ceased. On the 8th November a 6-inch Creusot gun opened fire from the top of Bulwana, and began at once to give serious trouble. And on the 9th November the Boers made a general attack upon the line of defences with artillery and rifle fire. Except at one point, Cæsar's Camp, the infantry attack was never dangerous, and on most parts of the line the action was over by noon. The fact was that the Boer riflemen did not care to close, partly perhaps because they had no bayonets, but partly for the reason given by Mahan when speaking of the actions fought by the British at the beginning—

> And there can be also little question that the wholesome respect for their fighting qualities, thus established at the beginning of hostilities, had a most beneficial effect for them,

in discouraging attack by an enemy who, though brave and active, constitutionally prefers a waiting game to an assault.

The British casualties in this affair were very small—four killed and twenty-seven wounded. Those of the Boers cannot be stated; but the result certainly was to increase the confidence of the garrison, and to discourage the enemy, who never attacked again until two months later.

At noon a salute of twenty-one shotted guns was fired at the enemy by Lambton's naval guns, in honour of the birthday of the Prince of Wales, and three cheers were given by the troops in camp and on the defences; after which a message to be telegraphed to the Prince was despatched by pigeon post to Durban. It was duly received and acknowledged.

The incidents of the next few days are not easy to follow in detail; but about the middle of November White learnt that troops were being sent to Natal from the Cape, and that there was a prospect of an advance in strength against the Boer forces encircling him. Soon afterwards he was told that an attempt was being made to communicate with him by some means more certain and rapid than the pigeon post. The General Officer commanding the line of communications telegraphed to him:—

I am getting search-light fixed on truck, and will flash signals with it from Estcourt by night. Watch sky for flashing signals. Try to effect means of reply.

At first this arrangement proved difficult to work, but after a time some messages were caught by reflec-

tion from the clouds, and White felt less cut off from the outer world. He was, to use his old Indian expression, "Kilaband"; but it was something to receive a message, or a portion of one, now and then; and he had hopes of being able before long to establish direct communication by heliograph, when the southern troops should reach a point within sight of some part of his defences. For this the garrison was constantly on the watch.

On the 22nd November Buller himself started for Natal, arriving on the 25th. A considerable force had already assembled, and though small bodies of Boers had crossed the Tugela, the Boer Commander-in-Chief had practically given up the hope of any serious invasion of Southern Natal. So ended, after less than a month, the first period of the siege of Ladysmith. Many anxious days still lay before the garrison and the relieving force, but even as soon as this the Boer plan of campaign had almost broken down. Durban and Southern Natal were now safe from immediate conquest, and the British had gained what they most wanted—time.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—SECOND PERIOD.

THE second period of the Ladysmith siege opened cheerily enough. A large British force was now gathering in Southern Natal, and it seemed probable that by co-operation between this force and the garrison the Boer investing line would soon be broken. Gun ammunition was not too plentiful, but, thanks to White's forethought and the exertions of Colonel Ward, there was as yet no scarcity of food supplies, and the invested troops were in good spirits. Before the end of November, too, they learned that the Boer raiders who had crossed the Tugela had been attacked, and so roughly handled that they had recrossed the river. All seemed to promise well for the success of Buller's advance when it should take place.

The garrison had even established a newspaper, 'The Ladysmith Lyre,' the opening numbers of which contained some interesting matter. As an example I may perhaps give an extract from a poem illustrating the life of the civilian population in its bomb-proof

shelters. This is headed "The Poet under the River Bank," and begins with the following Rubaiyát :—

Wake, for above Bulwán the coming day
Lights up the signal for the guns to play;
How sweet to know 'tis but a living tomb
Awaits you, and there's time to creep away.

E'er the last shadow of the darkness died,
Methought a voice within the cavern cried:
"Look here, there ain't no room for more than ten,
And if you're late, you'll have to stop outside."

Oh, dreams of pluck and fears of cowardice!
One thing at least is certain, cordite flies;
One thing is certain in this town of lies,
If Long Tom gets you on the head, you dies.

Some of escapes and some of ventures tell,
To some life's dull without bombardment—well,
The far-off shrapnel makes a pretty cloud,
And sweet's the whisper of a *distant* shell.

I do not know who was responsible for this paper, nor how long it lasted; but evidently it had on its staff some artists and writers of merit, and a little fooling under such conditions was an excellent thing.

But for the heavily burdened General in Command, though he seems to have duly appreciated the fooling, there was much in the position to give cause for anxiety. One special trouble was the number and efficiency of the enemy's spies. For example, his despatch of the 23rd March, already quoted, has the following passage on the subject:—

I arranged an attack on Rifleman's Ridge for the 29th November, but was compelled to abandon it, as just at sunset the enemy very strongly reinforced that portion of their line.

There can, I think, be no doubt that my plan had been disclosed to them, and indeed throughout the siege I have been much handicapped by the fact that every movement, or preparation for movement, which has taken place in Ladysmith, has been at once communicated to the Boers. The agents through whom news reached them, I have unfortunately failed to discover. I have sent away or locked up every person against whom reasonable grounds of suspicion could be alleged, but without the slightest effect."

White's Chief of the Staff, General Hunter, explained in his evidence before the Royal Commission that "every farmer in the neighbourhood was a Boer, or a Dutchman with Boer sympathies," and, though this was evidently an over-statement of the case, it is clear that the attitude of a large number was thoroughly hostile. Under such conditions, as many of the Colonial Dutch knew English well, it was practically impossible to prevent spying, and this added greatly to the difficulties of the defence. Plausible English-speaking men and women could get into and out of the British lines at any moment; for the circumference of the defences was great, and any one who knew the ground ran little risk of being stopped, while even if stopped he could probably give some excellent explanation of his movements.

To a certain extent the position favoured secret coming and going on the part of the British also. It was possible for a man who knew the ground well to creep away through the Boer lines in the dark, and this was at times done. For example,

White records that two civilians who volunteered to blow up a railway bridge outside the enemy's lines duly reached their destination and got back undetected. But the British officers in general, not knowing the country and its ways, were helpless in such matters, and of the civil population it was not easy for them to know whom they could trust.

On the 29th of November the Ladysmith garrison observed flashing signals on the clouds at night from Estcourt, where the relieving troops were gathering, and were able to read a portion of a message.

> At a later period of the siege [White writes] no difficulty was experienced in reading such messages, but we were without the means of replying in similar fashion.

However, a few days later, heliographic communication was restored by Weenen, to the south-east, and for the future, so long as there was daylight and sun, the garrison and the relieving force were no longer out of touch.

Meanwhile the garrison steadily continued its efforts to harass the enemy, and to facilitate the advance of the relieving force. Some of these efforts were unsuccessful, doubtless on account of the excellent information which the Boers managed to procure. Thus White records that on the 5th December, and again on the 7th December, detachments of infantry moved out to surprise outlying farms usually occupied by the enemy as night out-



Bassano.

GENERAL SIR ARCHIBALD HUNTER, G.C.B., &c.

posts. The farms were in each case found empty. But some of the night enterprises were more fortunate in their results. For example, on the night of the 7th December White's Chief of the Staff, Major-General Hunter, made a sortie for the purpose of destroying some Boer guns on Gun Hill, four miles or so from Ladysmith, which had been causing much annoyance. Hunter's force consisted of 500 men of the Natal Volunteers, under Colonel Royston, and 100 of the Imperial Light Horse, under Lieut.-Colonel Edwards, with 18 men of the Corps of Guides under Major Henderson of the Intelligence Branch to direct the column, and a few men of the Engineers and Artillery, with explosives and sledge-hammers to destroy the guns when captured. The perilous expedition was carried out with entire success. Making their way across the rough plain in the darkness, and then clambering up the steep boulder-strewn hill, often on their hands and knees, the gallant little force surprised and captured the Boer guns. A 6-inch Creusot and a 4·7-inch howitzer were destroyed, and a Maxim captured and brought into camp, which was safely reached about sunrise. It was a fine feat of arms, and brought much credit to the Imperial Light Horse and the Natal men.

The Imperial Light Horse, it may be explained, was a *corps d'élite*, 1200 strong, formed from among the British refugees who had left Johannesburg. They were well-educated, prosperous men, the pick of the men Great Britain had sent out to the mining

country. General Hunter said of them before the Royal Commission: "They were the finest corps I have ever seen anywhere in my life," and George White once described them in a public speech as the bravest men he had ever had under his orders. They greatly distinguished themselves time after time all through the war, and were a magnificent example of what a volunteer force can become under the training of competent officers like Chisholme and Edwards.

The Natal Volunteers, too, of various corps, did fine service throughout. They were, according to General Hunter, largely Scotch, or of Scotch extraction, and almost all young farmers or farmers' sons, accustomed to a hard outdoor life, and to riding and shooting. Such men are the finest material in the world for soldiers, and they are to be found in scores of thousands all over the Empire.

But the feats performed by the garrison of Ladysmith in these sorties were by no means entirely or even mainly the work of the "auxiliary" troops. On the night of Hunter's expedition,

> three companies of the 1st Battalion Liverpool Regiment, under Lieut.-Colonel L. S. Mellor, seized Limit Hill, and through the gap in the enemy's outpost line thus created, a squadron 19th Hussars penetrated some 4 miles towards the north, destroying the enemy's telegraph line, and burning various kraals and shelters ordinarily occupied by them. No loss was incurred in this enterprise.

Again on the morning of the 9th December a cavalry force under Brigadier-General Brocklehurst,

with a battery of artillery, moved out along the Newcastle Road for a reconnaissance, which was

carried out in a very bold and dashing manner by the 5th Lancers and 18th Hussars.

The effect of these various enterprises was shortly evident in the return from the line of the Tugela next day of some 2000 Boers,

and the consequent weakening of the Boer force opposing Sir Redvers Buller.

Then, on the 10th December,

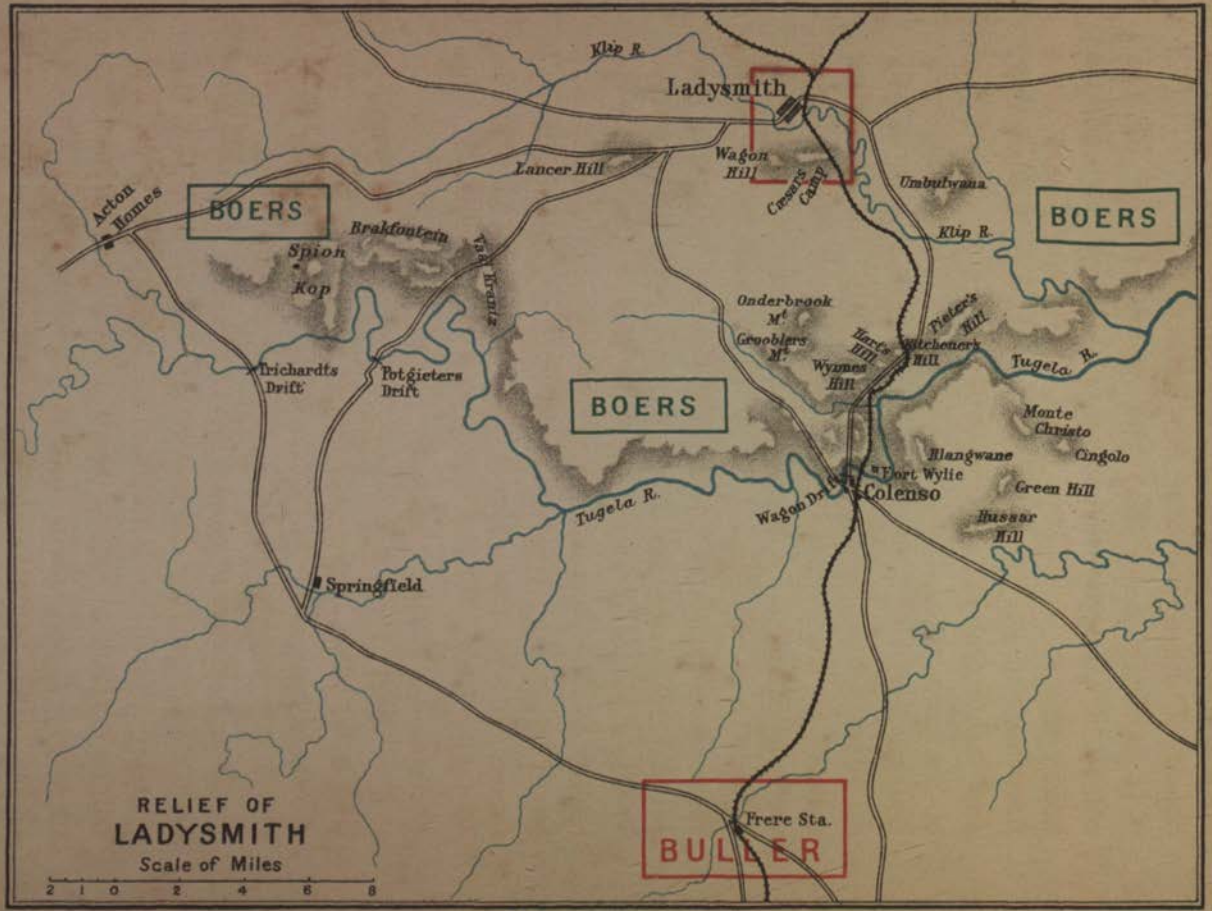
Lieut.-Colonel C. T. E. Metcalfe, commanding the 2nd Battalion Rifle Brigade, volunteered to carry out a night enterprise against a 4·7″ howitzer on Surprise Hill. The undertaking was one of very considerable risk, as to reach that hill it was necessary to pass between Thornhill's and Bell's Kopjes, both of which were held by the enemy. Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe moved off at 10 P.M. with 12 officers and 488 men of his battalion, together with a destruction party under Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., and succeeded in effecting a complete surprise, his advance not being discovered until he was within 4 or 5 yards of the crest line, which was at once carried, and the howitzer destroyed. The retirement, however, proved more difficult, since the enemy from Bell's and Thornhill's Kopjes, consisting apparently of men of various nationalities, closed in from both sides to bar the retreat. Lieut.-Colonel Metcalfe, however, fixed bayonets, and the companies, admirably handled by their captains, fought their way back to the railway line, where a portion of the force had been left in support, and from which point the retirement became easy.

In this affair the Rifle Brigade had some sixty casualties, but a number of the enemy were killed

with the bayonet, and by the British fire, and the object of the expedition was attained.

It will be seen that the garrison had in the course of a few days destroyed three of the enemy's heavy guns, and kept him well employed, thus fulfilling the purpose of their retention in Ladysmith, and lightening the task of Buller's force. The firing of his guns from the direction of Colenso had now become audible, and White's attention was chiefly directed to preparations for moving out a flying column to co-operate with him. These preparations were completed by the 15th December. The flying column was to be a large force, consisting of a brigade of cavalry, two brigades of infantry, and several batteries of artillery, and was to be under White's personal command. It was to be ready to leave Ladysmith at short notice, and fight out towards Buller, the holding of the Ladysmith defences in the meantime being entrusted to Colonel W. G. Knox, C.B., with the remainder of the garrison—a small remainder.

The Boer force in Natal was now in a position which at first sight seems a precarious one. Its numbers have been variously stated, but at this time they can hardly have exceeded 25,000 men. Sir Frederick Maurice indeed gives reasons for thinking that they probably did not much exceed 20,000. Regarding Southern Natal as its front, this force had before it General Buller, with a force now amounting to nearly 20,000 men, close to the line of the Tugela river; while behind it lay the garrison of Ladysmith,



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originally some 14,000 strong, and allowing for casualties and sickness, still numbering fully 12,000 effective men. As the two British forces were separated by a distance of little over twenty miles, and were in communication with each other by heliograph, they might be expected to act in concert. The Boers therefore had not only to maintain their grip upon, and keep within its defences, the strong garrison in their rear, but after detaching men enough for this purpose they had to beat off with the remainder any attack by the force in their front, which was nearly as large as their own. It seemed too late now to throw their weight upon the Ladysmith force and try to destroy it by assault, for they would certainly meet with a desperate resistance from troops full of fight and strongly entrenched, while they would offer a fine opening for attack to Buller's force. It seemed equally hopeless to throw their main weight on Buller; for, if they left behind them men enough to hold the Ladysmith garrison, they would have to attack Buller in the open with inferior numbers.

But in truth the position of the Boers was not as difficult as it seemed. They had in their favour two advantages of very great importance. In the first place they held, in the crescent of rugged hills which overhang the northern bank of the Tugela for a distance of sixty miles or more, a line of defence which was very hard to attack from the southward. "The approaches to the beleaguered town from the south," says Sir Frederick Maurice, "were thus covered by an immense natural redoubt." Opposite the very

centre of the front face of this redoubt lay the village of Colenso; just north of Colenso the railway crossed the Tugela, and then wound through a confused mass of hills to Ladysmith. Through this mass of hills ran also the only practicable roads between Colenso and Ladysmith, affording a series of very strong positions.

Along the face of this strategic fort ran the Tugela, an admirable moat, as completely commanded by the heights on its left bank as is the ditch of a permanent work by its parapet.

Both to east and west of Colenso the river could be crossed at some points by fords; but very few of these were practicable for guns and waggons, and they were mostly difficult to approach from the south. The curve of the river, moreover, is such that the commander of a Boer force placed about the centre of the line of defence, near Colenso, had a shorter distance to get over in order to reinforce either flank than a force from the south would have to get over in attacking.

Moreover, not only did the heights he held afford a perfect view for miles over the country to the south, but the Tugela hills are precipitous and rocky as to their southern faces, while the approaches to them from the north present, as a rule, easy slopes and gentle gradients.

Looking only to the lie of the ground, therefore, a force attacking the line of the Tugela from the south, and trying to force its way to Ladysmith, had a difficult task to face.

This was one of the two great advantages enjoyed by the Boers. The second was their superior mobility. Selecting for attack any point in the long line of the mountain redoubt, other than the centre, Buller, leaving his line of communications on the railway, would have to march to right or left over open ground south of the river, in full view of an enemy concealed from sight among the hills to the north, and at the rate that infantry and ox-waggons could move; while the Boers on their ponies could canter out at least three times as fast, and be ready to meet him, probably entrenched in some strong position covering the ford by which he intended to cross the river. And as occasion offered a portion of the Boers investing Ladysmith could be moved out rapidly to reinforce the advanced bodies holding the river line.

These two advantages went far to compensate the enemy for their numerical inferiority, and gave them hopes that they might be able to keep Buller off until the Ladysmith garrison fell into their hands. So highly did they estimate the strength of their defensive line that they kept the bulk of their force round the beleaguered town, and sent Louis Botha to hold the river with six or seven thousand men only.

Botha had on the hills above Colenso about this number, or according to the Boers even less, when Buller's first attack took place. This occurred on the 15th December.

Before that date Buller had carefully considered the various lines of advance open to him—the direct route by way of Colenso, and the river crossings to

east and west. The direct route he had at once rejected, as the strongest and most difficult of all. The eastern line of advance, though comparatively short and in some ways attractive, had also been rejected, because it passed through rough country, and would have involved much bush fighting, which is specially trying to troops untrained in it. Moreover, the Ladysmith garrison could not have helped much on that side. Finally, it had been settled that the attempt should be made by a drift or ford called Potgieter's, some fifteen miles to the west of Colenso. This was the state of affairs when, on the 12th December, Buller received news of a severe repulse suffered by Lord Methuen at Maagersfontein, following on a reverse inflicted upon General Gatacre at Stormberg, both in Cape Colony. This intelligence, in Buller's opinion, so entirely changed the situation, that he no longer thought it desirable to move on Potgieter's.

This operation [he told the War Office] involved the complete abandonment of my communications, and, in the event of want of success, the risk that I might share the fate of Sir George White, and be cut off from Natal. I had considered that with the enemy dispirited by the failure of their plans in the west, the risk was justifiable, but I cannot think that I ought now to take such a risk. From my point of view it will be better to lose Ladysmith altogether than to throw open Natal to the enemy.

On the 13th December, therefore, Buller sent the following message to White:—

Have been forced to change my plans; am coming through *viâ* Colenso and Onderbrook Spruit.



Duffus Bros.

GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA.

It will be seen that the abandonment of the march to Potgieter's did not necessarily, in Buller's opinion, mean the loss of Ladysmith. He was still going to get through if possible. What it did mean was that in order to get through he was going to attack the line of the Tugela at Colenso, and try to force the direct route, which was believed to be strongly entrenched and held.

White answered :—

Your No. 78 of to-day received and understood. Shall be very glad if you will let me know your probable dates.

To which Buller's reply was :—

No. 80, 13th December.—Three brigades concentrate in Chieveley to-day. Fourth brigade go there to-morrow. Actual date of attack depends on difficulties met with; probably 17th Decr.

Upon receipt of this telegram the final arrangements were made for moving out the force to co-operate with Buller, and a special order on the subject was published on the 14th December. Then White awaited the signal for action. He did not know the reason for Buller's change of plans, and made no comment upon it; but he was ready to fight out with the bulk of his force whenever required.

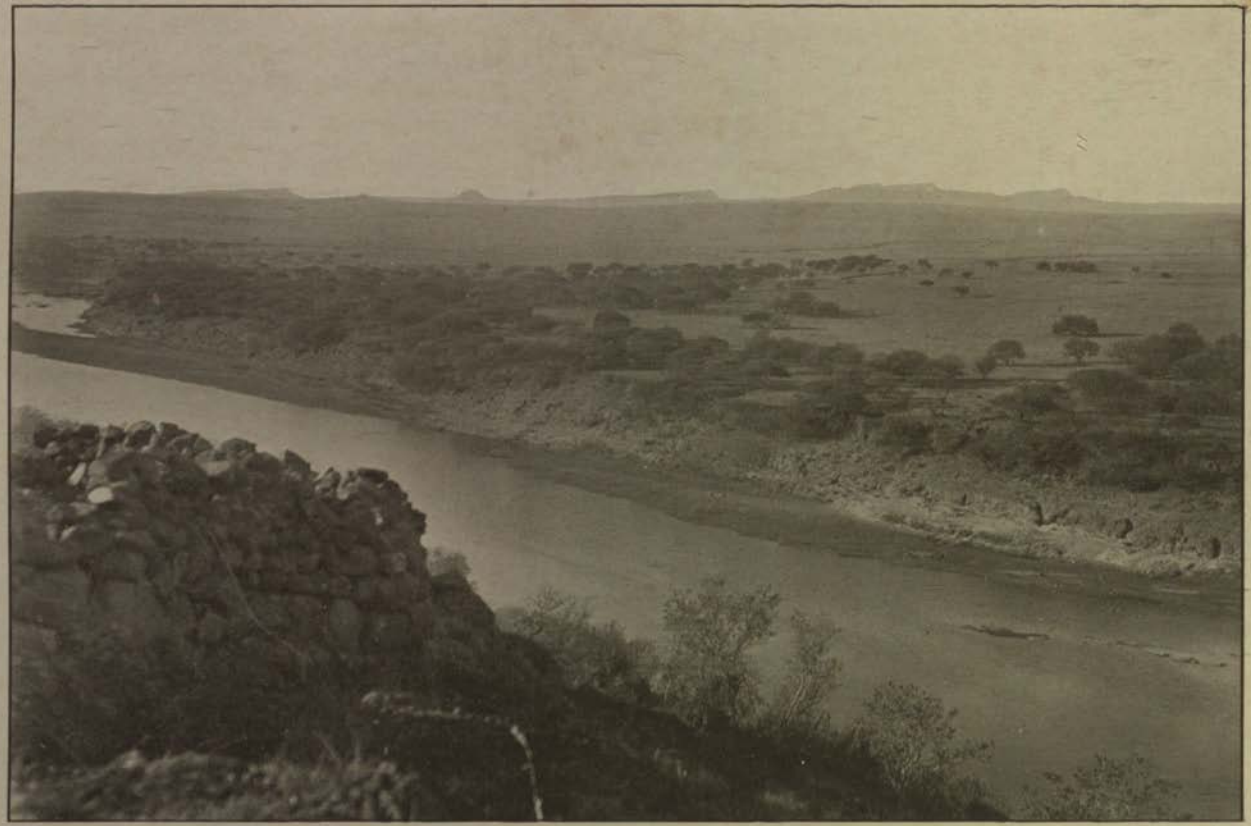
The expected signal was never given, and in the absence of it White remained in Ladysmith. I cannot find from the telegrams which passed that Buller had definitely promised to give one; but his evidence before the Royal Commission shows what his intention was, and why he did not call upon the Ladysmith

garrison to move. After explaining his position and its difficulties, he says:—

> I decided, therefore, to effect a lodgment, if possible, on the other side of the Tugela, and, if I succeeded in doing this, to direct Hunter to take command of the Ladysmith garrison, and march along the watershed to Onderbrook, while I myself marched simultaneously upon the same point. From my knowledge of the Boers, I felt assured that, if attacked at one and the same time by Hunter from the north and by myself from the south, they would never maintain their position. But until I had secured my lodgment on the other side of the river, I did not feel justified in calling upon the Ladysmith garrison to move. The risk to them would, I felt, be too great.

Buller's intention, therefore, was to give the signal, but not until he was across the river; and then he apparently meant to supersede White, and entrust the conduct of the operation to Hunter, White's Chief of Staff, in whom he had greater confidence. In these circumstances it is not perhaps surprising that he did not state his intentions beforehand. His advance beyond the Tugela was, it seems, to be made with half his force, "at least 10,000 men" being kept to defend Southern Natal.

It is unnecessary to enter here upon a detailed account of Buller's attack—the "battle of Colenso." As every one knows, it failed. The Boers, entrenched and to a great extent concealed in a very strong position, had less than thirty casualties, while the British advancing across open ground south of the river, in full view of the Boer trenches, lost in



Colenso. Part of the Battlefield, from the Boer position.

killed, wounded, and prisoners, over eleven hundred men, and ten guns were left in the hands of the enemy.

During this unfortunate day the Ladysmith garrison remained within their defences, knowing nothing of the fight, and therefore making no effort to co-operate.

> The sound of very heavy artillery firing on the 15th [writes Sir Frederick Maurice] was, it is true, heard in Ladysmith, but the Colenso position had been shelled by the naval guns on the two previous days, and in face of Sir Redvers' message that the actual attack would probably be made on the 17th, there was doubt whether the firing heard on the 15th might not be merely a continuation of the preliminary bombardment. A premature sortie before the signal had been given might seriously hamper, or possibly entirely frustrate, concerted action between the two forces.

As I have shown above, a sortie was not expected or desired by Buller.

White and his troops up to this time were in fair health and good spirits. There was some sickness, it is true, but not enough to cause serious anxiety; and the food supply was sufficient. Of course even now anything beyond the daily ration was not easy to get. Lieut.-Colonel St John Gore writes under date the 15th December[1]:—

> Food is now getting decidedly scarce, and both officers and men are often on decidedly short commons.
>
> It is difficult to buy *anything*, but when for sale, prices are

[1] 'The Green Horse in Ladysmith.'

very high. At a semi-official sale of market produce, &c., some of the prices realised at auction were as follows:—

1 bottle of whisky, £3, 3s.
1 dozen eggs, 9s. 2d.
1 pot jam, 3s. 6d.
Sack of potatoes (25 lbs.), 18s. 6d.
8 lbs. mutton, 10s. 6d.

(The mutton was the bargain! Lieutenant Clay got it for "C" squadron mess. This is considered quite worthy of record here!)

Some of the cunning men of war among us still manage a precarious supply of milk for their squadron messes. The grazing area over which our cattle can roam is now so much restricted that the milk supply has almost ceased.

Sickness among the garrison has been sadly on the increase lately, and dysentery and enteric have made great inroads on its available fighting strength.

The 5th Dragoon Guards have been comparatively fortunate in this respect, and for many consecutive weeks the health of the regiment was returned as "good." At this time we had in hospital, from various causes, one officer and 42 N.C.O.'s and men.

White's letters at this time are few, but the following are extracts from a letter to his wife which, begun on the 9th December, was continued throughout the siege:—

I think I may commence a letter to you, as Sir Redvers Buller is approaching the Tugela, and we may reasonably expect some hard fighting within the next week, the result of which I hope will be the relief of Ladysmith and the opening of our communications with the outside world from which we have been so long cut off.

Ladysmith is full of newspaper correspondents who will give very full accounts of the incidents of the siege, so I will not attempt to give you a history of it. When we meet I

shall have many little incidents to tell you. I have been in good health all the time, but it has been weary work. However, I fought in the open as long as I could with a superior enemy on both sides of me. I was heartbroken over the loss of the Gloucester Regiment, the Royal Irish Fusiliers, and the Mountain Battery. . . .

We occupy a very large position here: it is some 13 miles round it. This is rendered necessary by the immense range of the enemy's guns. One big 6-inch gun which annoyed us for a very long time threw a shell into our lines to a distance of over 10,000 yards from the gun. This is about six miles. . . . When this repeated N. S. E. & West of us it makes it hot for us, but it is very remarkable how few casualties there have been. The soldiers spend the days in shelters, which save them from the shells. Most of the officers & civil residents have also dug themselves shelters underground. . . .

The night before last my Chief of the Staff, Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter, led a party of 600 picked men & made a raid on Gun Hill, one of the enemy's positions round Ladysmith. He surprised the post & took 3 guns, including one of the enemy's largest (6-inch) guns. I am so pleased, not only because that gun was doing us so much harm, but also because Hunter is such a delightful fellow and has done so well through the siege & previous operations. You will like to hear of our mess & manner of life. All the Headquarters Staff live in the same house, which we have commandeered. This is the list.

Sir G. White.
Colonel Duff.
Capt. F. Lyon.
Capt. Dixon, acting A.D.C. to me.
Major-General Sir Archibald Hunter, Chief of the Staff.
Capt. King, A.D.C. to Genl. Hunter.
Brigr.-General Ian Hamilton.
Lt.-Colonel Sir Henry Rawlinson.

We have had plenty to eat & to drink, and we keep very early hours. I am up about 4 o'clock every morning, and we generally retire between 9 & 10 o'clock. At one time, before our defences were as strong as they are now, I used always to sleep in my clothes ready to turn out in a second; but now a large proportion of the Boer Army has gone South to face the relieving force on the Tugela, & I turn in regularly. Most of the Regimental Officers, however, have to sleep in the open with their men in strong forts built of stones heaped together. There is no dearth of this class of building material in Natal. The climate is very variable—some days are very hot, about as hot as Simla in mid-June, or perhaps a little hotter. We then have a severe thunderstorm with most vivid lightning, & this cools the weather down greatly.

Ladysmith is a nasty place, & I fear there will be a terrible plague of enteric if we are kept here much longer. Already there are 80 cases, & the numbers are increasing rapidly. We had more enteric fever here last year than in any other station of the British Army, & I dread the result of siege conditions this year far more than the shells & bullets of the enemy. . . . The flies are a terrible nuisance. The number of horses, mules, cattle, &c., bring them in myriads. In our dining-room, which is very small, we catch them on fly-papers & in wire domes in millions, but it does not seem to diminish their numbers. They get into everything left uncovered. . . .

Johnny Hamilton has done extremely well in this campaign, & is, I think, sure to get a K.C.B., & I hope a V.C., for which I have recommended him. He was very brave at Elands Laagte, & General French who commanded there—I was present but did not assume command—recommended him to me, a recommendation I was of course very glad to support. . . .

Captain Wyndham, 16th Lancers, has my old friend "Premier" here, the horse that broke my leg. He bought it from General Symons when the latter left India. . . .

In one of the heliographic messages I have received since we got into communication with Sir Redvers Buller's force by

signal, I was given an extract from Reuter that "Lady White at Windsor." If this means that the dear old Queen has asked you in acknowledgement of my services it was *too* good of her. It gave me the first sensation of pleasure I have had since the Bell's sprut disaster. . . .

We got possession of a letter written by a Boer to his sister, which was interesting from its honesty. He said that "Mr Englishman fights very hard indeed, & does not seem to mind the shells falling thick into Ladysmith. Our burghers do not like their shells, & cannot stand them. We have been before Ladysmith now for a month, & we don't seem much nearer taking it. I fear there will be great bloodshed before it falls," & more on the same lines. I have, however, plenty of provisions, greatly due to Colonel Ward's foresight & excellent organisation. He is an admirable officer, & deserves all that can be bestowed on him for his masterly arrangements. Whatever we want we go to Ward & he finds it for us. . . .

16th Decr.

This is a great Boer fête day, Dingan's day, being the name of a Kafir chief they defeated heavily on the 16th December, but I don't know the year. . . .

I had hoped that Buller's force would have relieved us by now, but news has come in this morning through the signallers that there has been a fight (yesterday) south of the Tugela at Cheveley, result not yet known. This disappoints me much, as I thought Buller's force had forced all the enemy to this side of the Tugela, and that he would be here (Ladysmith) in a few days. . . .

Enteric fever is very bad here, and increasing at quite an alarming rate. Three weeks ago we had about 15 cases; today we have 180. . . .

White's ignorance about the state of affairs was not to last many hours longer, for on this same day, the 16th December, he received a telegram from General

Buller which informed him of the fight at Colenso and its issue. The telegram must have been a shock. It ran as follows :—

Clear line No. 88 of 16th December.—I tried Colenso yesterday but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force except with siege operations, & those will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? If not, how many days can you give me in which to take up defensive position? After which I suggest you firing away as much ammunition as you can and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternative suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in. I find my infantry cannot fight more than ten miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here.

White has recorded in his evidence before the Royal Commission that when he received this telegram his first thought was that the cipher had fallen into the hands of the Boers. He replied :—

No. 32 of 16th December.—Your No. 88 of to-day received and understood. My suggestion is that you take up strongest available position that will enable you to keep touch of the enemy, and harass him constantly with artillery fire and in other ways as much as possible. I can make food last for much longer than a month, and will not think of making terms till I am forced to. You may have hit the enemy harder than you think. All our native spies report that your artillery fire made considerable impression on enemy. Have your losses been very heavy? If you lose touch of the enemy it will immensely increase his opportunities of crushing me, and may have worse effect elsewhere. While you are in touch with him, and in communication with me, he has both our forces to reckon with. Make every effort to get reinforcements as early as possible, including India, and enlist every man in both Colonies who will serve and can ride. Things may look brighter. The loss of

12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not yet think of it. I fear I could not cut my way to you. Enteric fever is increasing alarmingly here. There are now 180 cases, all within the last month. Answer fully. I am keeping everything secret for the present till I know your plans.

In the meantime, or a little later, but on the 16th December, Buller amended his telegram, and the amendment made it run as follows :—

Clear line No. 88 of 16th December.—I tried Colenso yesterday but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force except with siege operations, and those will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? How many days can you hold out? I suggest your firing away as much ammunition as you can and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternative suggestion, but unaided I cannot break in. I find my infantry cannot fight more than ten miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here. Whatever happens recollect to burn your cipher, decipher, and code books, and all deciphered messages.

This amended message was sent off on the morning of the 17th December, and at the same time, or immediately afterwards, "the first thing in the morning," according to General Buller's evidence, was sent the following :—

Clear line No. 93, 17th December.—I find I cannot take Colenso, and I cannot stay in force near there, as there is no water; but I am leaving there as large a force as I can to help you; but recollect that in this weather my infantry cannot be depended on to march more than 10 miles a day. Can you suggest anything for me to do? I think in about three weeks from now I could take Colenso, but I can never get to Onderbrook.

White answered :—

Clear line No. 33P, 18th December.—Your No. 93 17th December received and understood. It is difficult for me to make suggestions, as I do not know situation outside or whether you have made serious attempt to take Colenso, and with what loss. Your messages were previously confident, and I had made preparations to fight towards Onderbrook, and could still do so if you had Colenso. I cannot advise leaving small force in advance of main body. It would probably be invested, and be no real threat to enemy. Your front line should be held in full strength. Abandonment of this garrison seems to me most disastrous alternative on public grounds. Enemy will be doubly strong on Tugela if Ladysmith falls. I can only suggest getting every available reinforcement in men and guns, and attacking again in full force as early as possible. Meantime I will do all I can to maintain an active defence, and will co-operate with you to the extent of my power if you advance again. How are you getting on in the Free State? We know nothing. Detailed news desirable, to contradict mischievous rumours here.

Such were the position and views of the two commanders as far as the heliographic messages enable one to understand. It is evident that each was inclined to doubt whether the other was doing all he could have done. Indeed Buller's evidence before the Royal Commission shows that this was his view about White. He says with reference to White's message of the 16th December :—

To me its chief significance was that he could give no assistance towards his own relief, and that he relied upon me to keep the pressure of the enemy from him.

This when White had almost his whole force ready to fight out on receipt of the signal for a concerted

movement. As to White's view about Buller, White's message of the 18th December seems to show that he thought Buller was contemplating the abandonment of the Ladysmith garrison, and this, perhaps, without having made any "serious attempt to take Colenso." Afterwards there was much controversy about these matters. No good purpose would, I think, be served by reviving that controversy now. Neither commander seems to have obtained, at first, by means of the rather precarious heliograph, full information as to the difficulties and intentions of the other, and there was therefore room for some misapprehension on both sides.

In the meantime the situation had been cleared by correspondence between General Buller and Her Majesty's Government. On the evening of the 15th December, after the painful repulse at Colenso, Buller had telegraphed to the Secretary of State for War:—

> My failure to-day raises a serious question. I do not think I am now strong enough to relieve White. Colenso is a fortress which, I think, if not taken on a rush, could only be taken by a siege. There is no water within eight miles of the point of attack, and in this weather that exhausts infantry. The place is fully entrenched. I do not think either a Boer or a gun was seen by us all day, yet the fire brought to bear was very heavy. Our infantry were quite willing to fight, but were absolutely exhausted by the intense heat. My view is that I ought to let Ladysmith go and occupy good positions for the defence of South Natal, and let time help us. But that is a step on which I ought to consult you. I consider we were in face of 20,000 men

to-day. They had the advantage both in arms and in position. They admit they suffered severely; but my men have not seen a dead Boer, and that dispirits them. My losses have not been very heavy. I could have made them much heavier, but the result would have been the same. The moment I failed to get in with a rush, I was beat. I now feel that I cannot say that I can relieve Ladysmith with my available force, and the best thing I can suggest is that I should occupy defensive positions, and fight it out in a country better suited to our tactics.

This telegram was considered by the British Cabinet on the 16th December, and the proposal to "let Ladysmith go" was instantly rejected. On the same day a reply was sent in the following words:—

Her Majesty's Government regard the abandonment of White's force and its consequent surrender as a national disaster of the greatest magnitude. We would urge you to devise another attempt to carry out its relief, not necessarily *vid* Colenso, making use of the additional men now arriving if you think fit.

These additional men consisted of a fresh Division, the 5th, which was about to arrive in Capetown. Buller was further informed that a 6th Division was beginning to embark, that a 7th would begin to embark early in January, that another cavalry brigade would also be sent, and that the guns lost at Colenso would be replaced.

The "Black Week" of Stormberg, Maagersfontein, and Colenso had stirred the spirit of the nation and the empire. Militia, yeomanry, and volunteers in Great Britain came forward eagerly for service, and the

oversea dominions, which had already offered troops, proposed to send further contingents. From one end of the Empire to the other, the resolve to carry through the war at all costs was enthusiastically shown. For the future there was to be no doubt as to the provision of ample forces. And in order that these forces should be able to act with the fullest effect, it was decided by Her Majesty's Government, on the proposal of Lord Lansdowne, that Lord Roberts should be asked to undertake the duties of Commander-in-Chief in South Africa, with Lord Kitchener as his Chief of the Staff, Sir Redvers Buller being entrusted with the prosecution of the campaign in Natal, which, it was felt, would require his presence and whole attention.

With this decision opened an entirely fresh phase of the war, and at the same time the second period of the siege of Ladysmith came to an end. Henceforth there was to be no question as to the relief being carried out if relief were possible. The Boer war scheme had already been defeated by the failure to carry Natal in the first rush, owing to the resistance of White's force. The cause of the Republics had now become desperate, for troops were pouring out from England to South Africa at the rate of a thousand men a day, and this was to continue for months. Ladysmith might still fall, either by an overwhelming assault or by starvation, before a relieving force could fight its way through the mountain barrier held by the enemy; but in the first two months of the war the Ladysmith troops

had saved Natal from conquest, and, whether they now continued to hold the place or not, their main work had been done. Thanks to her Navy, England, given time, could be very strong six thousand miles from home. The one hope of eventual victory for the Boers had lain in a swift overwhelming offensive before she could bring her strength to bear. Though perhaps they did not know it, that hope was now gone. They might still make a gallant resistance and inflict painful defeats on their great enemy; but against the resources of the British Empire their resistance, however gallant, must in the end prove unavailing. Their chance had been lost.

CHAPTER XV.

SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—THIRD PERIOD.

THE second period of the siege of Ladysmith had ended in disappointment and gloom. Not only had Buller's repulse at Colenso put an end to all immediate hope of relief, but White was doubtful whether any further attempt at relief would ever be made. He knew nothing of the decision of Her Majesty's Government, and Buller's telegrams were not encouraging. To add to the darkness of the situation, he had received news of the reverses at Stormberg and Maagersfontein. And, finally, he had now begun to feel serious anxiety not only about the increase of sickness in the garrison, but also about the food supply. The two things were closely connected. Though the men's ration was still sufficient to keep them from serious suffering, it was not too large or varied, and the effects of a restricted diet were beginning to show. The discouragement of hope deferred, too, was sure to make matters worse, and White had been obliged to inform the garrison on the 17th December that they "must not expect

relief as early as had been anticipated." It was altogether a somewhat cheerless prospect.

But a ray of light was soon to come. On the same day — the 17th December — Buller, who had received the telegram conveying the decision of Her Majesty's Government, sent a cipher message to White:—

No. 97, *December 17th.*—Fifth Division just arriving at the Cape. Have telegraphed for it to come on at once. It will make me strong enough to try Potgieter's. How long can you hang on?

This message was received by White on the 18th December. He replied at once:—

No. 34P, *December 18th.*—Your 97 cipher of yesterday received and understood. Delighted to get it. I have provisions for men for 6 weeks, and I have confidence in holding this place for that time, but bombardment becomes more trying. I had 22 casualties this morning from one shell. Enteric and dysentery increasing very rapidly. I can get on well for 3 weeks, keeping even horses moderately fit. If you wish to wait for siege-guns, it is worth waiting a little to dominate and overwhelm the enemy's guns. Bring every heavy gun, naval and others, you can get. Water will be difficulty as regards occupying a position near Tugela river from which you can maintain continued attack. Could you arrange pipes, pumping station, or reservoir?

It is perhaps unnecessary to point out that the occupation of a position near the Tugela by no means implied the possibility of using the river water. That was under the command of the Boer fire at close range, and was therefore not available

to the British. It was, to use Sir Frederick Maurice's simile, the moat of the Boer fortress.

Throughout the month of December, one of the hottest months of the hot South African summer, sickness had been increasing fast in Ladysmith, and during the last fortnight of the year the increase became alarming. It was now, White has recorded, his "chief source of anxiety." On the 15th of December the number of sick was 874; on the 31st it was 1558, or, according to Maurice, 1650. Thus more than a tenth of the original force was now inefficient, and of course this implied that the health of the remainder was being lowered. Every possible effort was made by Colonel Ward to improve and supplement the untempting rations of beef and bread, and all concerned did their best to keep up the spirits of the men by sports of various kinds. Cricket and football matches were played under fire from the long-range Creusot guns, the Boer gunners on Bulwana looking on through their glasses, and showing at times a sporting interest in the amusements of the troops, but at times sending a heavy shell to break up any considerable gathering. Concerts and other entertainments were held, and after sunset the brave women of Ladysmith sang and played as though there were no danger of their houses being shattered about them. But in spite of all, the garrison began to lose health fast, and the enemy knew it only too well.

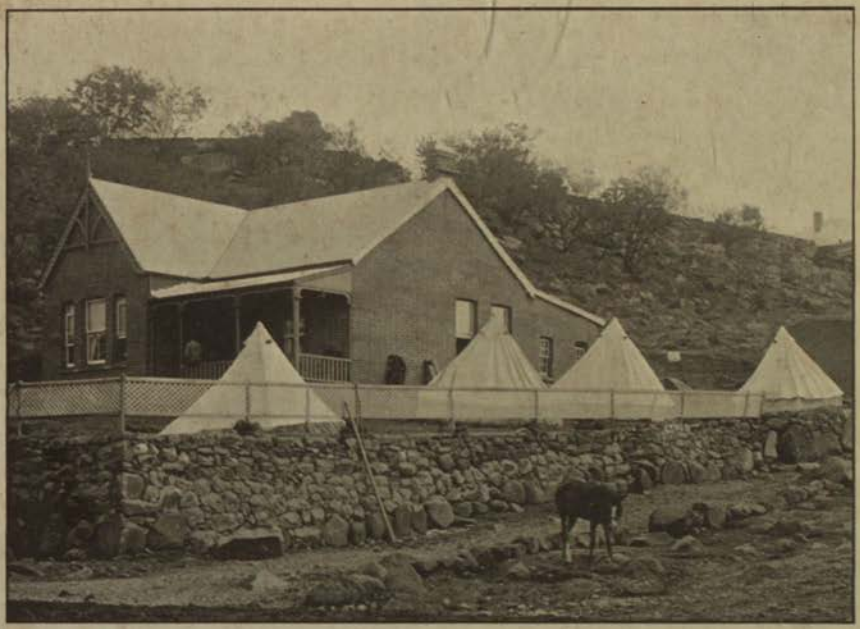
They seemed to know everything, and among other things they knew precisely the position of

the General's headquarters. The little house he occupied on the slope of "Convent Hill" was more or less sheltered, but several times the Boer gunners had dropped their shells very near it, and on the 21st December they succeeded in hitting it. As White lay in his room ill with fever a large shell burst in the next room, shattering the wall and furniture, but luckily killing no one.

Unfortunately [writes Lieut.-Colonel Gore] it landed among the "English stores" and the liquor, and it pains one even to think of the sad destruction of good drink and stores at such a time! They are more sought after than anything else at present.

A rough sketch of "General Sir George White's Quarters," showing the effect of the shell, may be worth reproducing here.

The Boer gunners did more damage than this. During the last fortnight of the year their artillery, which now numbered more than twenty pieces, "continued to bombard daily, and with increasing effect." Considering the number of shells poured into the British position, the loss of life was not so great as might have been expected; but at times it was serious. On the 18th of December a single shell from Bulwana killed four men, and wounded seven men and twelve horses. On the 22nd December another shell killed nine men and wounded three. On the 27th December another killed or wounded eleven officers and men. So it went on; the tale of killed and wounded gradually mounting up until it



Sir George White's Headquarters at Ladysmith.



Damage by Shell Fire to Headquarters, Ladysmith.

had become considerable; and though both troops and civilian population learnt to regard the bombardment with little concern, yet it was not a thing to be despised, for it circumscribed the limits of available camping grounds and caused inconvenience in many other respects.

On the 1st of January 1900, White received a heliograph message informing him that Buller meant to make before long his second attempt to relieve Ladysmith, this time from the westward. Buller's intention was to start from Frere on the railway line about the 6th January, by which time he hoped the 5th division would have arrived. The message closed with the words:—

I will inform you later of my exact date of departure from here, and will endeavour to keep you informed of my movements, but my telegraph line may be cut.

This was cheering news, and White received it with great pleasure. He replied:—

If you will trust me with further details of your plan, I hope to be able to assist you in the later stages of your advance on Ladysmith; but to do this effectually, I should require to know on which line or lines you intend to force passage of Tugela.

Buller answered on the 2nd January that he proposed to cross the river at Potgieter's.

I expect a stiff fight when crossing the river, possibly a fight at the place I camp, between river and Lancer's Kop, and another fight there. If you can recommend me any better point of attack than Lancer's Kop, please do so. As troops

are not arriving up to time, I doubt if I can start until the 8th January. I calculate it will take me seven days to reach Lancer's Kop.

White replied on the same day :—

As you intend crossing Tugela river at Potgieter's, Lancer's Hill becomes an essential point on your line of advance. If you can keep me informed of your progress, I can help you by attacking Lancer's Hill from north when you attack it from south-west. Communication by signalling from hill above Potgieter's should be easy. Do not hurry on date of starting on our account if recently arrived troops need rest, as I am quite confident of holding my own here.

White's confidence was soon to be severely tested. Whether the details of Buller's plan had become known to the Boers it is impossible to say, but they doubtless knew or guessed that reinforcements were coming to him, and that a fresh attack upon the line of the Tugela would not be long delayed. They must have felt that time was against them, and that unless they could do something to improve their position, it was likely to become more precarious as the days went on. Hitherto, after the abortive attack upon Ladysmith of the 9th November, they had shrunk from any further attempt of the kind, though the matter had been more than once discussed in their war councils. Now they discussed it again, and came to the conclusion that they must harden their hearts and make one determined attempt to carry Ladysmith by assault. It was an operation foreign to their usual methods of waging war, and to the cautious spirit of their Commander-in-Chief, Joubert; but on

this occasion the party of action prevailed, and on the 5th of January the necessary orders were issued. The Boer plan was excellent. Very early on the morning of the 6th January a picked force of four thousand men, half from the Transvaal and half Free Staters, were to make a sudden assault in the darkness upon the most exposed, and at the same time the most important part of the British defences, known as Cæsar's Camp, while feints were made at various other parts to keep the garrison employed. If the assault succeeded, the victorious force would be established in a position from which it would be very difficult to dislodge them, and one which would make Ladysmith practically untenable.

Sir Frederick Maurice has explained in his 'History of the War' the great importance of that position.

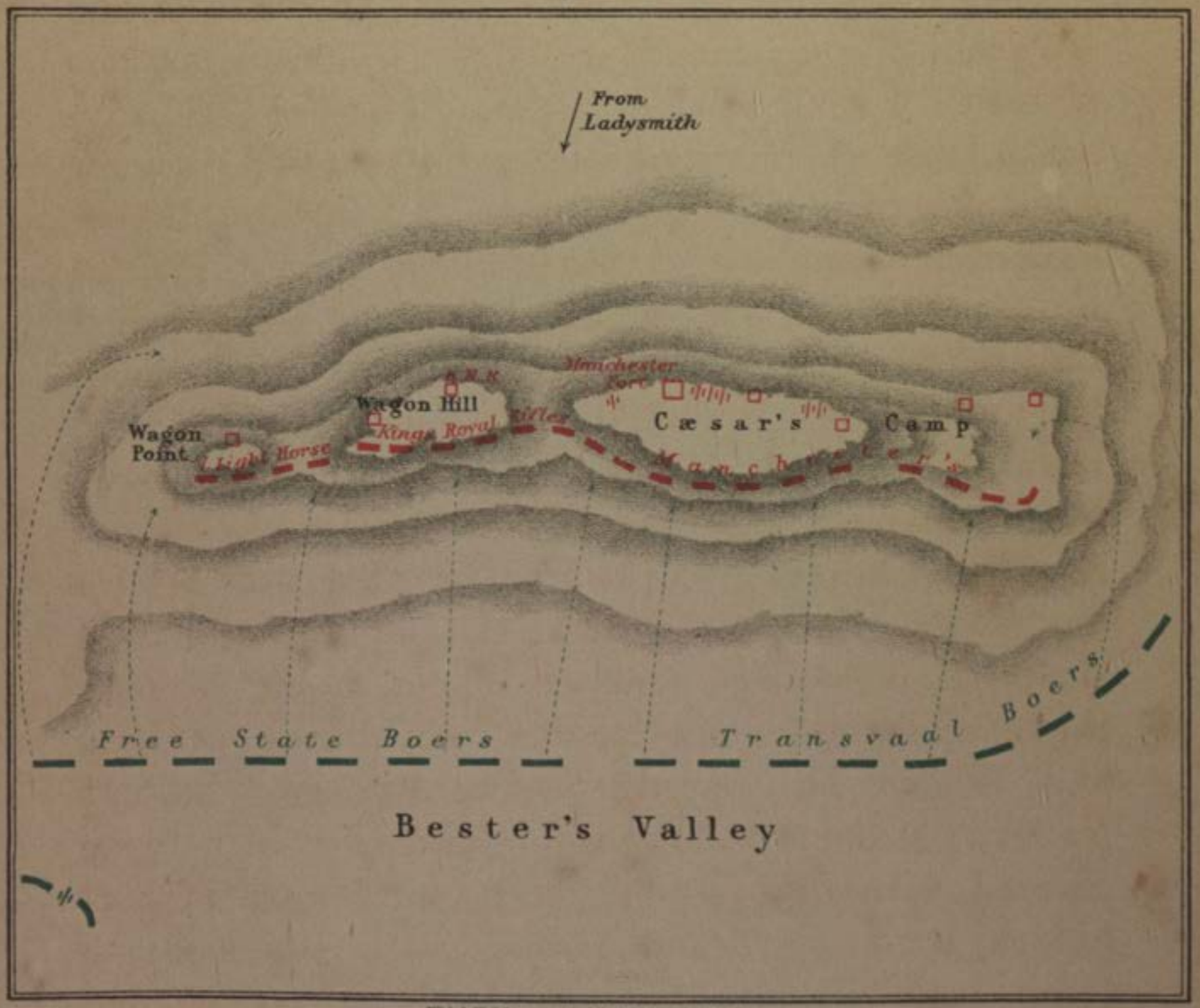
> From the earliest days of the investment [he writes], the Boers, with that unerring tactical eye which distinguished them, had marked the Cæsar's Camp-Wagon Hill plateau as the key of the British defences. Such it was indeed. Situated no more than 3000 yards from the centre of Ladysmith, with a command of 600 feet, it not only dominates the town itself within extreme rifle range, but, if lost, would have rendered impossible the occupation of every other position without exception. For there is none which it does not overlook from flank to rear within field artillery range.

Sir George White, it is true, would hardly have admitted the entire correctness of this description. He believed that even if the plateau had been lost he could have fallen back upon, and held "for some time," an inner position which he had prepared—an

"inner citadel," as General Hunter called it. But, White said, the enemy would have been able in that case to inflict upon him very heavy losses. It seems clear that at best his continued tenure of Ladysmith would then have been a very difficult, if not a desperate undertaking.

The sketch annexed shows roughly the features and situation of the plateau or ridge, for it was not one plateau. Forming the south-eastern heel of the Ladysmith horse-shoe, it runs almost due east and west for a distance of about two miles and a quarter. It consists of two separate heights of unequal length, joined by a nek. The eastern and larger of these, called Cæsar's Camp, is a flat-topped hill nearly two miles long, and from eight hundred to a thousand yards in breadth. Wagon Hill, much shorter and narrower than Cæsar's Camp, but slightly higher, forms the rest of the ridge. Wagon Hill itself consists of two knolls: one, the eastern, being the larger of the two; the other, generally known as Wagon Point, forming the actual end of the ridge. Both Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill faced southward, over "Bester's Valley," a deep valley, the sides of which were covered with boulders and scrub, and were in part hidden by salients and ravines from the sight of troops holding the ridge. An attacking force coming up in the darkness out of Bester's Valley had to face a rough climb, but might hope to get near the crest of the ridge at various points without detection. It might also hope to overlap both the eastern and western points of the ridge.

CÆSAR'S CAMP
January 6th 1900.



W. & A. K. Johnston, Limited, Edinburgh & London.

British
Forts
Infantry
Artillery

Boers
Extended in position
Artillery

The troops actually holding this long position on the night of the 5th January were very few for its size, far too few to occupy, if they could have made, anything like a continuous line of entrenchments. On Cæsar's Camp were the 1st Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, under Colonel Curran, a battery of field artillery, the 42nd, a naval detachment with a 12-pr. gun, and a detachment of Natal Naval Volunteers with a Hotchkiss. On Wagon Hill were three companies of the 2nd King's Royal Rifles under Major Gore Browne, and two weak squadrons, together not 80 men, of the Imperial Light Horse. In all, there were probably not 1500 men on the ridge. The defences crowning the heights on the morning of the 6th January were not of imposing strength. On both heights the northern or inner crest of the ridge, which is slightly higher than the southern, had been chosen for the "line of resistance." The southern or outer crest formed the "line of observation." That is to say, that in case of serious attack the fighting line would lie along the northern crest, having in its front a flat, or comparatively flat, field of fire, varying in breadth from 1000 yards on Cæsar's Camp to less than 300 yards on Wagon Hill. The steep and half-hidden slopes of Bester's Valley would be watched by piquets, but the field of fire there from the southern crest was not good, and moreover, any Boer force which succeeded in reaching the southern crest would be on the flank of troops holding it. The northern crest therefore seemed the better line for the de-

fenders to hold. Accordingly the piquets lining the outer crest were sheltered only by sangars, the main defences lying farther back. Thus on Cæsar's Camp the Manchester Regiment had two semi-enclosed and two enclosed works. The former contained the supports to the piquets; the latter, which were of considerable strength, stood upon the line of resistance. Pits and emplacements sheltered the guns. On Wagon Hill the sangars for the piquets were backed by a redoubt called the Crow's Nest, which formed the headquarters of the three companies of Rifles, and further west by two smaller works, which were held by the two squadrons Imperial Light Horse.

It happened that on the morning of the 6th January the small force holding this line of defences had been temporarily increased. It had been White's intention to place three of his heavy naval pieces, two 12-pdrs. and a 4·7-in. gun, on Wagon Point; and after dark on the 5th, Lieutenant Digby Jones of the Royal Engineers, with 33 sappers, arrived to carry out the necessary work, while a little later the 4·7-in. gun was brought to the northern foot of the hill, escorted by two naval officers and 13 bluejackets, and 170 men of the Gordon Highlanders. There it remained until its emplacement should be ready.

The sappers went on with their work all through the night, with the help of a detachment of 50 men from the Manchester Regiment, who had been sent over from Cæsar's Camp, and about 2.30 A.M. all

was nearly finished. The night had been quiet, and, shortly before, an officer of the Imperial Light Horse, who had patrolled to within a short distance of one of the Boer positions, had returned with the report that nothing was stirring in the enemy's lines. The fatigue party of the Manchester, their work done, left for Cæsar's Camp.

Ten minutes later, at 2.40 A.M., a piquet of the Imperial Light Horse heard sounds of movement in the ravine below their sangar; a sentry challenged, and, receiving no reply, fired. Instantly there was a crash of musketry from the darkness, and the Light Horse supports running up were met by a heavy fire from a body of Boers who had reached the crest of the hill. Several men fell. Almost at the same moment Jones and his sappers found themselves under fire at close range. The surprise was complete, and in the desperate fighting which followed the British losses were severe. The Free Staters swarmed over the crest from many points at once, and pressed the attack with such resolution that for a time it seemed as if Wagon Hill must be lost. The defenders fought fiercely, but their fire was overpowered, and small parties which tried to charge with the bayonet were shot down before they reached the enemy. One party of the Boers even worked round the western point of the hill and came upon the 4·7-in. gun, which was still lying in its waggon at the foot of the slope. They were beaten off by the guard, but they were actually in rear of the British line. Thus, after an hour from

the beginning of the attack, at 3.45 A.M., as day began to break,

> the whole position was enveloped in a confusion of musketry; the defenders, who were in many parts intermingled with, or actually in advance of the enemy, finding themselves attacked from so many directions at once, that no man knew whether to meet with the bayonet the Boers close upon him, or to reply to the rifles of those more distant.

In the meantime, at the other end of the ridge, the Transvaal men had made their attack also. It was delayed for some time after the attack of the Free Staters, and it was not pressed home with such resolution; but it came from an unexpected quarter, and was for the moment completely successful. The Boers told off to attack Cæsar's Camp had chosen for their point of assault the extreme eastern extremity of the ridge—the heel of the horse-shoe. Stealing in the darkness round the left of the Manchester Regiment, they climbed the slope, which is here fairly easy, and, reaching the crest, poured a sudden volley at short range into the nearest piquet, from its left rear. The piquet was surprised in a hopeless position and suffered severely. For some reason the Transvaal men did not push their advantage by an immediate advance, and though their fire increased in strength they seemed for the moment satisfied to hold the ground they had gained.

Nevertheless, as day dawned, the situation was sufficiently serious. The enemy, it is true, had not in their first rush swept the defenders off the ridge,

or captured the main defences; but they had established themselves on the southern crest of the ridge at several points, had inflicted considerable losses, and had got round both extremities of the long weakly-held position.

When the news of the attack was brought to Sir George White at about 3 A.M. by his Military Secretary, Beauchamp Duff, he was in bed at "Christopher's," the house to which he had moved after the partial destruction on the 21st December of his former quarters. The attack of fever from which he had then been suffering had passed off, and since Christmas he had been in good health. It is fortunate that the 6th of January found him well and full of energy, for he had a long and trying day's work before him. Beauchamp Duff was followed immediately by the Chief of the Staff, General Hunter, and White issued orders for the rapid despatch of reinforcements to the points attacked. The whole of the Imperial Light Horse remaining in reserve at Ladysmith was to go at once to Wagon Hill, and the 2nd Gordon Highlanders to Cæsar's Camp. Half an hour later the Headquarters of the 1st and 2nd King's Royal Rifles were also ordered to move out, and four companies of each battalion were soon on the way.

These arrangements having been made, White dressed and came down from his house to one occupied by the Headquarters Staff, in the verandah of which was the central telephone connected with every part of the defences. It was then daylight.

In the verandah of this house, or in the plot of ground in front of it, White remained until the fighting was over, and here he was joined at times by his cavalry general, Brocklehurst, by Hedworth Lambton, commanding the naval detachment, and others.

Meanwhile Colonel Ian Hamilton, in whose section of the defences lay the position attacked, had already collected three companies of the Gordons, two of which he took with him to Wagon Hill, sending the third to reinforce the Manchester Regiment on Cæsar's Camp. The rest of the battalion, under Lieutenant-Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, V.C., marched out shortly afterwards from their camp at the south-west corner of Ladysmith. Some of the enemy's bullets, passing over the ridge, were now dropping into the ground behind it, and one of these mortally wounded Dick-Cunyngham as he rode at the head of his men.

The first of the reinforcements arrived at about 5 A.M. These were the Imperial Light Horse, and the three companies of Gordon Highlanders brought up by Ian Hamilton. The Light Horse, who had ridden out fast, joined what was left of their two squadrons in the fighting line on Wagon Hill, and one company of the Gordons marched straight upon, and pushed back, the Boers who had come in on the left flank of the Manchester piquet. A few mounted infantry of the 1st (King's) Liverpool Regiment also joined the Manchester, and the Boers at the eastern end of the ridge were then held. Soon afterwards

they were more than held, for although daylight had enabled the Boer guns to open upon the plateau with effect from various directions; it also allowed the British artillery to come into action; and the 53rd battery, under Major Abdy, moving out fast from Ladysmith towards Cæsar's Camp, so roughly handled the Boers on the hill and their supports below, that they began to give way. The Gordons then charged with the bayonet, and cleared the eastern crest of the ridge.

At the same time the 21st battery, under Major Blewitt, also trotted out from Ladysmith, and moving to the western end of the ridge, shelled the ground below it, and prevented the Boers turning Wagon Hill from this side.

Both flanks of the ridge seemed now, about 6 A.M., fairly secure, but on the summit the fighting was fierce; and throughout the early hours of the morning White, who was in close touch by telephone with every phase of the action, continued to receive urgent demands for further reinforcements. Before long he had sent forward the whole of his reserve of infantry, and nothing but his cavalry remained. It was an anxious time, for it must be remembered that although the main attack of the enemy was upon the southern ridge, they were threatening other parts of the defences, and it was possible that their feints might at any moment turn into something more serious. Indeed General Hunter, in his evidence before the Royal Commission, says that "two very determined attacks" were made on points other than

the southern ridge. But the pressure of the main attack had to be met, and somewhere about eight o'clock White decided that he must put in his cavalry also. Three squadrons of the 5th Lancers and two of the 19th Hussars were sent to Cæsar's Camp, and the 18th Hussars to Wagon Hill. At 9.30 there was nothing left, and White, who had some time before informed Buller by heliogram of the attack, now sent a message :—

> Attack continues, and enemy been reinforced from south. All my reserves are in action. I think enemy must have weakened his force in front of you.

He had done all he could do himself, and perhaps hoped that Buller might be able to create a diversion by an attempt on the Tugela.

Buller did in fact make a demonstration in front of Colenso, and bombarded the Boer line of trenches, but they were found to be fully manned, and no attack was delivered.

In truth, though White and his staff at the Headquarters House could not know it, the most critical moment of the attack was already over. Much hard fighting had yet to be done; but the Boers on the crest of the ridge, who had failed to rush in the darkness the weakly-held defences, could hardly hope to take them by daylight, when the defenders had been reinforced, unless they received strong reinforcements themselves. And such reinforcements were not forthcoming. Parties of men from the Boer supports no doubt came up at times throughout the day to feed

the attack, but a large proportion showed no signs of a desire to help their comrades in the fighting line. They lay inactive under cover, many of them on the other side of Bester's Valley, and the brave men on the crest gradually recognised that they had been abandoned to their fate. They went on fighting doggedly, but they made no progress, and at about eleven o'clock, both on Cæsar's Camp and on Wagon Hill, their deadly close-range rifle fire from the boulders and folds of the hill-tops began to decrease in volume. The Boer generals, watching the progress of the fight from the summit of Bulwana, probably felt that their great attack had failed.

Nevertheless, the struggle was by no means at an end. At about 12.30 a small party of Free Staters, led by Commandant de Villiers and Field Cornet de Jagers, suddenly rose to their feet and made a rush across the crest line of Wagon Point. Some infantrymen lying in front of them, taken by surprise, gave ground; and for a moment it seemed as if the knoll would be lost. Luckily the Boers who followed de Villiers were few in number. As it was, they swept across the hill-top, and reached a point where Colonel Ian Hamilton himself had just arrived, but there they were stopped. Digby Jones of the Engineers, who was lying close by under a tarpaulin shelter, seized a rifle and running out to meet them shot de Villiers dead. De Jagers was also killed. Then Jones, accompanied by Second Lieutenant Denniss and his sappers, with a few of the Light Horse and Bluejackets, charged down the rest

of the assailants, and once more cleared the hill-top. Soon afterwards two squadrons of the 18th Hussars came up the northern slope from the rear, with the infantrymen who had retired, and fell into line with the party under Digby Jones. The success, however, was only momentary. Digby Jones was killed by a bullet in the throat; Denniss, going to his assistance, was also killed, and the restored front line was again hard pressed, for the enemy's rifle fire now increased in volume, and the Boer artillery poured in a heavy fire from the surrounding heights. All along Wagon Hill the British held on to their positions, but could not drive off the enemy or master their fire. Two hours after de Villiers had made his rush and been killed the fight was still undecided.

White had fully expected a renewal of the attack; and now, having long ago put in all his reserves, he felt that the fate of Ladysmith was trembling in the balance. At 3.15 he sent off to Buller the short message which thrilled England—a message which was not received until the next day: "Attack renewed, very hard pressed."

It was then found possible to send to the critical point some men of the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, and 5th Dragoon Guards, who had been employed elsewhere, and the dismounted troopers came into the fighting line about 3.30 P.M., just as a heavy storm broke over the field. For the next hour and a half the fight went on, in drenching rain, at a very short range, neither side being able to do more than hold its own. Besides the Imperial Light Horse, who had

throughout been "the backbone of the defence," to use the words of Ian Hamilton, there were now on Wagon Hill squadrons from no less than four cavalry regiments. White may well have been thankful that day that, when he decided to hold Ladysmith, he acted upon his own judgment and kept his cavalry with him.

The close of the dramatic struggle was now at hand. About four o'clock in the afternoon, feeling that the enemy must at all costs be driven off the ridge before nightfall, and having no reserves left, White determined as a last effort to withdraw some men from another part of the defences, and the Headquarters of the 1st Devon Regiment received orders to march at once for Wagon Hill. At five o'clock three companies (5 officers and 184 men, under Major Park), marching rapidly, had reached the foot of the hill, and Park reported his arrival to Ian Hamilton. He was ordered to turn out, with a bayonet charge, the Boers occupying the southern crest. Forming up his men in a small depression behind the northern crest, Park told them to fix bayonets, and after explaining to his officers exactly what was to be done, ordered the charge. Then he led them over the northern crest, and the three companies, forming line as they came into the open—for there had been no room to do so before—went with a cheer at the enemy. It was a proof of the discipline and steadiness of this fine regiment that, being told as they ran forward to change direction to the right, they "responded as if at exercise," and, coolly swinging up their left, fell

into their exact direction before charging home. As they made their final rush there burst over them a sudden storm of thunder and hail, while from the rocks in their front, only a hundred and thirty yards away, the enemy's fire blazed in a fierce volley. But though in crossing this interval an officer and forty men went down, the rush was not checked, and the enemy did not await the bayonets. Springing to their feet they fled down into the valley below them, and the hill was finally cleared.

The Devons had yet to suffer some loss from the fire of the enemy's covering troops. Two more officers were killed and one severely wounded before darkness fell, so that Park alone remained out of the five who had led the charge; but the work had been done. The enemy, now thoroughly beaten, fled into Bester's Valley from all parts of the ridge; and the British, lining the southern crest, slew many of them in the ravines, which the three hours' storm had turned into rushing torrents.

The numbers engaged in this day's fighting were not large, and the total losses were not much more than 1000. The British casualties amounted to 424, including 17 officers and 158 non-commissioned officers and men killed or mortally wounded. The Boers, being the assailants and unsuccessful, for once suffered more than their enemy, and certainly lost from 500 to 700 men. In the present day such losses seem insignificant; but the effect of the fight was out of all proportion to the casualty lists. The Boers were thoroughly disheartened by their failure, and never

again attempted to take Ladysmith by assault. Not only had the attack been beaten off, but the conduct of the Burghers had shown that, for lack of soldierly discipline, they were incapable of any attack on a large scale. Many of the men who were to form the assaulting columns had never left their camps; and, of those who did so, only a small proportion joined in the gallant attempts to rush the crests. It was not their method of fighting, and the bravest of them were forced to recognise that for the future they must rely upon other means for the reduction of the town.

The following extract from White's long letter to his wife, written during the early part of January, gives some further details of the siege, and of the action of the 6th:—

4th Jany. 1900.

I wrote last on the 16th December. About that time we had a bad disappointment in Sir Redvers' reverse at Colenso on the 15th. I don't know the story of it even yet, so I wont criticise, but we had all hoped he would get through to us & enable us to take a more active part in the campaign. Since that time I have been seedy. I got fever, which I think was intimately connected with liver, & I could not get right. My head felt like splitting. I was lying on my bed not able to raise it off the pillow when a shell from the big gun on Bulwana hit the house & carried away the room next to mine. Sir Henry Rawlinson had a narrow escape. The shell carried away the chair in which he had been sitting a few minutes before.

Our house was knocked to pieces, & we have had to shift the Head Quarters to another house, where I go for meals, but I have taken up my abode at a nice new house on a hill which is exposed to shell fire, but so far the Boers have not

got information that I am living in it, and it is not regularly aimed at.

Some of their spies have been asking where I have gone to, as they know they knocked my house down. . . .

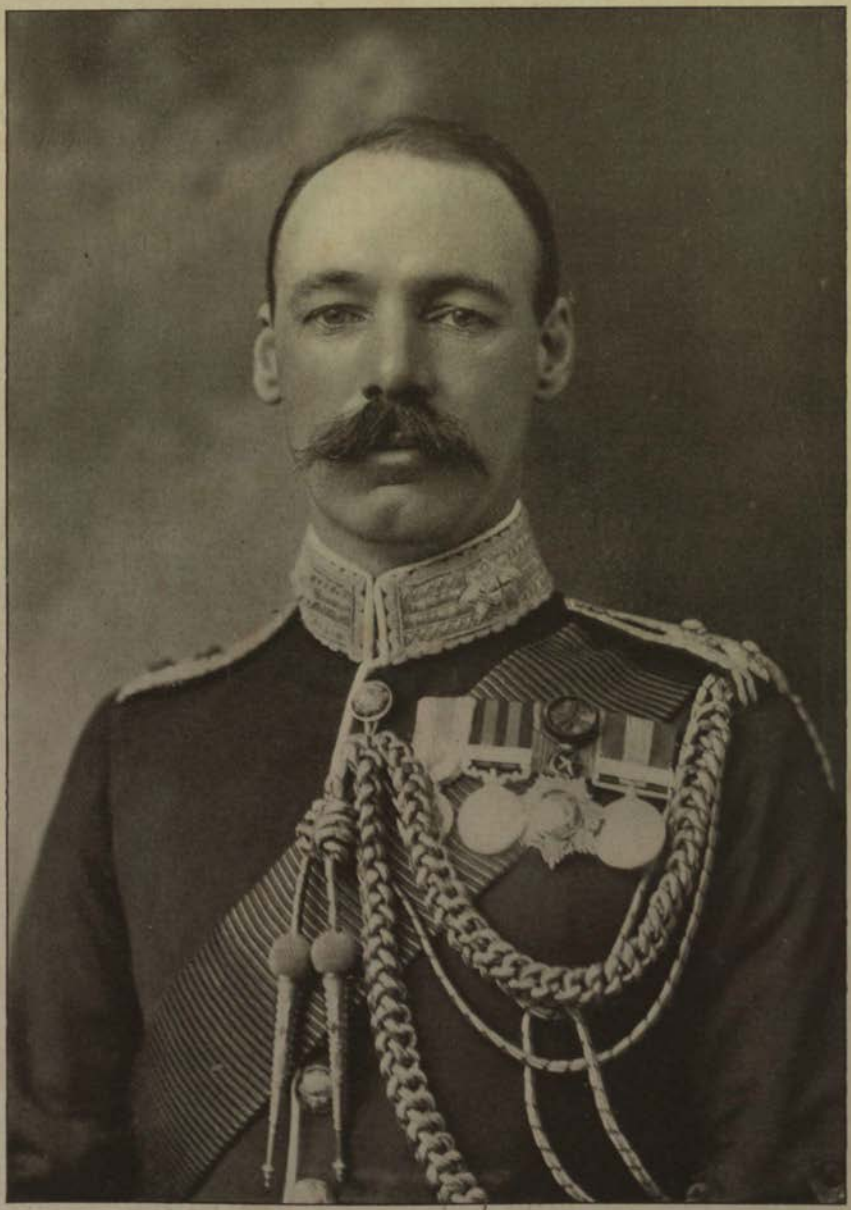
I was terribly sorry to hear that Freddy Roberts had been killed near Colenso on the 15th Decr. while bravely attempting to retake our guns which were lost on that day. . . . My force here is terribly reduced in efficiency by disease, & there is more enteric & dysentery every day. I have before me now our sick report of one month ago. The total sick & wounded then was 436. To-day the total is 1578. A month ago (1st Decr.) there were 29 cases of enteric fever, to-day there are 506; besides 285 not yet diagnosed. On the 1st Decr. we had only 76 cases of dysentery, to-day we have 588. . . .

The Boers occasionally treat us to a specimen of Dutch humour—*e.g.*, about Christmas they fired a plugged shell into our lines which, when dug out, proved to be full of plum pudding & had cut on it the united flags of the South African Republics and the following: "With the compliments of the season." . . .

The Boers generally give us a quiet day on Sunday. They are very religious people, and we see them moving from point to point to collect for public worship on Sundays. However they keep a very close look-out on us & open fire with their guns if they see anything like new works being made or movements of troops. Some of our young officers took advantage of the quiet & safety of Sunday afternoon to play polo. The Boers entered a protest against this desecration of the Sabbath by opening fire on them. . . .

9th Jany.

We were attacked by the Transvaal & Free State forces on the morning of the 6th, and after a very obstinate fight, which lasted from half-past 2 in the morning till half-past seven at night, we defeated them everywhere with great loss. I will not go into the details of the fight. The correspondents will tell you all that happened & probably a great deal more. . . .



Bassano.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR HENRY RAWLINSON, BART., C.B.

Johnny Hamilton was in command where the principal attack was made & did invaluable service. Everybody under him is full of his praises, & I have reported on him in the highest terms. The Boers have, I believe, been very heavily hit, & they cannot stand loss as we do. They entered upon this war under the impression that they were going to kill all of us without being killed themselves. . . .

Some of the Boers showed most determined bravery. An old man, one of their leaders, stalked up a steep hillside & with a few followers put their rifles over the parapet of one of our works & shot some of the officers & men in it dead, including Major Miller-Wallnutt of the Gordons. These Boers were, I believe, all killed, but they drove our people back for a time. When we handed over the dead to the Boers next morning (Sunday, 7th), as each succeeding hero was brought down—they were heroes—the Boers wrung their hands & owned that we had killed their best. Our losses in officers were as usual very great: 14 killed during the action & 25 wounded. Poor Colonel Dick-Cunyngham had a most unlucky wound from quite a stray bullet just as the 92nd were moving from their camp to reinforce. . . .

On Sunday morning I went to visit him & found him in Mrs Mallet's house. I thought him looking very bad & evidently in great pain, but his voice was strong. I persuaded him to consent to go to Intombi, & promised him he should have the privacy of his own tent there. He took a bad turn in the afternoon . . . and was dead in an hour. He was a fine brave soldier, and his loss will be very heavily felt in the Gordons. Miller-Wallnutt, too, was a most popular & valuable officer. . . .

Lord Ava has been here *en amateur*, & has been acting on Ian Hamilton's staff. The latter sent him on a message on Saturday morning, & as he was peering over a stone to note the enemy's position he was struck by a bullet in the head. I fear there is no chance of his recovery.

I signalled to Buller that Ava had been very dangerously

wounded, as I thought it would be right to prepare Lord Dufferin. Ava is one of the bravest of the brave, and has, I believe, enjoyed being in the thick of everything. . . .

It is a month to-day since I commenced this letter, & Sir R. Buller is still coming. I hope he will be here before the 9th of next month. The only effect of the approach of his force we have yet felt is that we have been receiving many shells from the Field Battery guns captured at Colenso on the 15th December. . . .

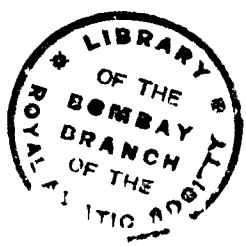
12th Jany. 1900.

I know that Buller is now advancing with a force which I estimate at near 30,000 men to attempt to cross the Tugela & relieve Ladysmith. I only wish I could help him, but my force is terribly reduced, principally by loss of officers in action I could not leave a garrison sufficiently strong to defend Ladysmith and move out to help him with more than 3000 men. Even if I abandoned Ladysmith altogether I would not march out with 8000 men, & the Boers would follow me up with at least this number, & as they all ride they could get round me. I would also have to deal with the enemy in front of me. . . .

I have therefore to play what to me is the painful part of sitting quietly in Ladysmith awaiting the success of Buller's force. If he is repulsed again we shall be in a bad way. I dread to think of what the effect on our Cause will be if Ladysmith is reduced by famine or taken by assault. The Boers have spent their chief force on the Conquest of Natal. Ladysmith has so far held them. If they take Ladysmith with its garrison & guns it will be a blow that it will be very difficult for our Empire to recover from. . . .

So ended the third period of the siege. The Boers had been beaten off in their attempt to take Ladysmith by assault, and had no desire to try again. If Ladysmith was ever to fall now it must fall from

starvation. Even so, its fall would no doubt have been a heavy blow to the Empire,—a blow struck too late. England had been given time to put out her strength, and the end was certain. But White did not know all that was being done, nor how great the effect of his victory had been; while the effect upon his own force of the increasing sickness, and of their losses in action, had been serious. He felt that Ladysmith had very nearly fallen on the 6th. He entered upon the last phase of the siege determined indeed to hold out to the utmost, but in no spirit of elation.


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CHAPTER XVI.

SIEGE OF LADYSMITH—FOURTH AND LAST PERIOD.

DURING the remainder of the siege, and it was to last for nearly two months longer, the struggle, to quote White's official despatch, "became one against disease and starvation even more than against the enemy." The bombardment by the heavy guns went on daily, and there was a constant exchange of rifle fire along the outer line of the defences, but there was no severe fighting, and the casualties were few. The garrison had rather to endure than to act. They were, no doubt, kept hard at work in strengthening their defences, especially at points which, like Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill, had been shown to be open to dangerous attack; but henceforth their attitude was to be one of patient vigilance. The active work of defeating the Boer army was now for the troops under Buller; while the garrison in the citadel, over which the British flag still floated, was to watch him trying, week after week, to break through to their relief at one point and then another of the great Boer fortress which hemmed them in.

At daybreak on the morning after the attack White rode out with Beauchamp Duff and Rawlinson to Wagon Hill. He was received by Ian Hamilton, who took him all over the scene of the fight, and they spent an hour climbing about the position, among the rough boulders and grass. After this White went to see his brother officer, Dick-Cunyngham of the 92nd. Then he sent to Buller two telegrams describing the fight and the consequent situation. He said the enemy had been repulsed everywhere with heavy loss, and that the troops had behaved excellently, and were elated at the service they had rendered to the Queen. But the second telegram, sent after the casualty lists had been made out, informed Buller that 37 officers had been killed or wounded during the day. It went on :—

> Troops here much played out, and a very large proportion of my officers have, up to date, been killed or wounded, or are sick. I would rather not call upon them to move out from Ladysmith to co-operate with you; but I am confident enemy have been very severely hit.[1]

It must indeed have been "painful," as White said, for him to come to this conclusion. He had always shown himself, for twenty years past, essentially a forward, fighting soldier, and nothing could have been more uncongenial to him than to send such a message. Buller's comment upon it was :—

> From this day forward I entertained no further hope of assistance from the Ladysmith garrison.

[1] 230 officers out of 592 were now unfit for duty.

And White must have felt that this, or something like this, would be the probable effect of his words.

Nevertheless he had not meant to say that under no circumstances would he call upon his exhausted troops for a fresh effort in the field. The fight of the 6th January had, it is true, shown him that he had no strength to spare. Only by throwing in all his reserves, and more, had he been able to repel the attack; and in case of another determined onslaught he felt that he would have hard work to hold his fourteen miles of defences. He had now recognised, for the first time, that to move out any considerable part of his force was to expose Ladysmith to grave danger. Still, on hearing next day, the 8th of January, that Buller was about to start upon his second attempt at relief, White once more prepared his flying column, which had been broken up after the Colenso fight, and telling Buller that "uninterrupted communication would be double value to me while you are en route for here," got ready for at least a demonstration, possibly something more, in support of the relieving force when an opportunity offered. In the last resort, if the relieving force failed to break through, it was his intention to abandon Ladysmith, with everything in it, and make a desperate attempt to cut his way out to them. This, as will be shown, he afterwards proposed, but fortunately the necessity did not arise.

Meanwhile sickness went on increasing at an alarming rate. On the 13th of January there were 2150 men in hospital, on the 16th 2400, "and many very weakly men at duty."

But Buller was trying hard to carry out his formidable task, and bring them relief. The country to the west of Ladysmith, inside the mountain line held against him by the Boers, is fairly open; and there are gaps in the line through which the summits of some of the hills south of the Tugela can be seen from various points of the Ladysmith defences. On the 12th of January the heliograph flashed out on a height above Potgieter's Drift, and from this time forward the besieged garrison received almost daily some information about Buller's movements. His advance seemed to be slow and difficult, and the anxiety in Ladysmith grew intense. On the 14th January the attempt on Potgieter's appeared to have been given up. Buller telegraphed:—

I find the enemy's position covering Potgieter's Drift so strong that I shall have to turn it, and I expect it will be four or five days from now before I shall be able to advance towards Ladysmith. I shall keep you constantly informed of my progress.

This was disappointing, but there was no sign of any want of confidence on Buller's part, and the garrison still hoped for his speedy success. White answered on the 15th January—

Your No. 156 of yesterday just received. I can wait. Wish you best of luck.

After this there was an interval of two days without any further news.

It may be explained here that the heliographic communications between White and Buller at this

time, and throughout, were not as frequent or as full as might have been expected. The reason for this was, it seems, partly the fear that messages might be intercepted and understood by the enemy. Lord Roberts stated in his evidence before the War Commission that the Boers did in fact intercept and correctly decipher some of his messages.

But on the evening of the 17th January came the welcome and long-expected news that Buller was over the Tugela. He signalled :—

I crossed one bridge at Potgieter's to-day, and am bombarding their position. Warren, with three brigades and six batteries, has crossed by Trichard's Drift,[1] and will move to the North to try and outflank Boer position. I somehow think we are going to be successful this time. . . . Every man in this force is doing his level best to relieve you. It is quite pleasant to see how keen the men are. I hope to be knocking at Lancer's Hill in six days from now.

This was great news, and White replied on the 19th January—

Congratulate you and ourselves on your successful progress, and have greatest confidence in seeing you soon.

Some fifteen miles away from Ladysmith to the westward, and clearly visible from several points of the defences, the double-headed hill of Spion Kop stands out beyond a broad rolling valley. Warren's turning movement was behind, to the west of, this hill, which formed the left of the Boer position; and the watchers in Ladysmith looked out

[1] Five miles west of Potgieter's.



Spion Kop.

anxiously for the flash of a heliograph on or near its summit; for Spion Kop once taken, Buller's troops would have an easy task before them. The mountain barrier would have been pierced. Between Spion Kop and Ladysmith there was no strong position on which the Boers could fall back.

White knew that the hill itself was a formidable barrier. Writing to his wife on the 19th he speaks of it as a "very strong position." His letter goes on:—

> Buller knows his business however, and we have only to sit down and wait until his men appear on the top of the said hill. We can see . . . his great Lyddite shells bursting on the enemy's side.

Soon White hoped to see what he called "the bright-faced helio."

But the flash was awaited in vain. On the 21st of January White signalled to Buller:—

> If you can let me know when you intend decisive attack on Boer position, I will demonstrate from here to draw as many as possible away from you. Experience leads me to think I can draw away a considerable number.

The answer was:—

> We are slowly fighting our way up the hill. I will let you know when help from you will be of most assistance.

On the evening of the 22nd White could see parties of the enemy from the positions about Ladysmith going out westward to strengthen the force opposing Buller, and at daybreak he opened

a strong artillery fire "to call them back." The two British forces were now so close, hardly twenty miles apart, that the Boer forces facing them could canter over to each other's support in an hour and a half. It was always difficult, therefore, at any given moment to know how many of the enemy were round Ladysmith and how many facing Buller.

On the 23rd January Buller signalled that an artillery duel was going on, in which the advantage rested with the British, and that on the following day an attempt would be made to seize Spion Kop. White replied on the 24th :—

> Many thanks for the efforts you are making. We await news of result with utmost anxiety.

It was an anxiety in which hopefulness was predominant. So much was this the case that on the 23rd White had ordered the issue of full rations to the troops, who had for some time been limited to half the scale; and it had been announced in Field Force orders that "the relief of Ladysmith may now be held to be within measurable distance." On the 24th shells were seen to be bursting on Spion Kop in great numbers, and apparently the attempt to seize it was being made, but no further news came. It had been made, and successfully, during the early hours of the morning. The shells were Boer shells, fired at the troops who had taken the hill. But this was not understood in Ladysmith. No news came on the 25th, but some of the Boer laagers on the Ladysmith side of Spion Kop were seen to



The side of Spion Kop ascended by the British.

be in retreat, "trekking" northwards. This seemed to show that Spion Kop had been taken, and that the Free State men were making for the passes of the Drakensberg. Then in the evening one laager was seen to return. On the 26th there was again no news from Buller, and the sun being hidden by clouds no news could be expected. The suspense deepened.

Sir Frederick Maurice in his History of the war says that at 10 P.M. on the 24th a lamp signal announced the capture of the mountain. If so, White never received the news. In a letter to his wife there is the following passage, dated the 26th :—

To-day has been very thick and rainy. There has therefore been no communication with Buller by sunflash (heliograph). Last night his signallers sent *part* of a message by lamp, and then ran out of oil before the message was half delivered. So far as it goes it is not encouraging, and looks as if Buller had failed in his attack on Intaba Nyama on the 24th.

Intaba Nyama, the Black Mountain, is the native name. The Boers called it Spion Kop, Prospect Hill, because it afforded a fine view to the southward across the Tugela. The letter goes on :—

27*th*.—There was a thick mist all night. I was up several times in hopes it might be clear enough to signal by lamp, but no hope of it. This morning, 11 A.M., the sky is blue & the horizon towards the West (Buller's direction) clear. I wonder what I shall hear. Will the helio belie its bright face & convey sinister intelligence to me & my force? The time is one of intense anxiety & our position here critical.

At last, about noon on the 27th January, the message came, and the long suspense was ended. The message had been written on the 25th, but there had not been sun enough to send it off. When it arrived, it brought to White and his troops a deep disappointment. It ran as follows:—

No. 170, *January 25th.*—Warren took Spion Kop the 24th, and held it all day, but suffered very heavily. General Woodgate dangerously wounded, 200 killed and 300 badly wounded, and his garrison abandoned it in the night. I am withdrawing to Potgieter's, and mean to have one fair, square try to get with you, but my force is not strong enough, I fear. I shall send particulars to-morrow.

This book, as before remarked, is a life of George White, not a history of the war in South Africa; and except in so far as White is concerned it is unnecessary for me to touch upon the details of military operations. Nothing will be said here, therefore, about the vexed question of the abandonment of Spion Kop, nor generally about Buller's conduct of his difficult campaign for the relief of Ladysmith. All that need be noted is that the failure to hold Spion Kop, and Buller's expressed fear that his force was not strong enough to get through to Ladysmith, brought the commander of the garrison face to face with a very grave situation. He had now to consider the question whether the time had not come when he should make a desperate effort to cut his way out and save if possible some part of his force, even at the cost of abandoning Ladysmith, rather than maintain the

defence of the town until the garrison became wholly incapable of action in the open. Once that stage was reached, the surrender of the whole would be inevitable sooner or later, if relief did not come from the outside.

On the 27th January White signalled to Buller:—

No. 55P, *January 27th.*—Your No. 170 of 25th only received to-day. We must expect to lose heavily in this campaign, and be prepared to face it. If you try again and fail, Ladysmith is doomed. Is not 7th division available to reinforce you? I could feed the men another month, but not all the horses, and without guns my force could do nothing outside. My medical supplies are nearly out, and the mortality is 8 to 10 daily already. I put it to you and the Government whether I ought not to abandon Ladysmith and try to join you. I could, I think, throw 7000 men and 36 guns into the fight. If you would commence preparing an attack and draw off the enemy, say, in the afternoon of a day to be settled between us, I would attack that night, and do my best to join you. The attack from here ought to have great effect, but I fear my men are weak, and in some instances morally played out. The fall of Ladysmith would have a terrible effect, especially in India.[1] I am deeply impressed with the gravity of the situation, and trust you will repeat this to the highest authorities. Deserters report Boers lost heavily on 24th, and were quite disheartened by your artillery fire. If we stick to them we may effect a junction, but my proposal is a desperate one,

[1] White dwelt on this point in his letter to his wife: "The fall of Ladysmith would be a *terrible* blow to England's prestige. It would have even a worse effect in India. . . . The fact that I, a late Jangi Lord Sahib, have had to haul down my flag . . . would shake India's belief in British power. Coupled to that it would be known that Lord Roberts Sahib, who is held throughout the length and breadth of India to represent England's military power, was in command and could not save us."

and involves abandoning my sick and wounded, naval guns, and railway rolling stock. I could not keep the field more than two or three days. I would hold on to the last here if political considerations demand it, or if there is a prospect of sufficient reinforcements to relieve us.

White afterwards stated in his evidence before the Royal Commission that rather than surrender the garrison

I preferred to try to get some survivors through, and to give others the chance of going elsewhere than Pretoria.

It was a soldier's choice—rather a fight, however desperate, and whatever the losses, than a surrender.

But neither Buller nor Lord Roberts, to whom Buller communicated White's proposal, thought the time had come to carry it into effect. Buller signalled next day that he proposed to attack at Potgieter's, which he thought he could take, and that if he got through he would be able to arrange for a simultaneous attack, White on Lancer's Hill, and he on Roodeport, where the Boers were now reported to be holding an entrenched position. "Believe me I will leave nothing untried." His message went on :—

Your No. 55P received since above was written. I agree with you that breaking out is only a final desperate resort. I shall try to force this position, and then we shall see. Some old Boers, who were very civil to our Doctors on Spion Kop, told them that there were 16,000 of them in front of us, and not more than 4000 left at Ladysmith. I have no means of knowing how true this is, but deserters say that most of the men are here. Lord Roberts says he cannot reinforce me, but that if you will wait till the end of

February, he will by then be in Bloemfontein, and will have relieved Kimberley, which will, he says, reduce the pressure on Ladysmith. I doubt Roberts' forecast coming off, and think I had better play my hand alone, and as soon as I can. What do you think?

On the same day White received through Buller the following telegram from Lord Roberts:—

I beg you will yourself accept and offer all those serving under your command my warmest congratulations on heroic, splendid defence you have made. It is a matter of the deepest regret to me that the relief of Ladysmith should be delayed, but I trust you will be able to hold out later than the date named in your recent message to Buller. I fear your sick and wounded must suffer, but you will realise how important it is that Ladysmith should not fall into the enemy's hands. I am doing all that is possible to hurry on my movements, and shall be greatly disappointed if, by the end of February, I have not been able to carry out such operations as will compel the enemy to materially reduce his strength in Natal.

White's proposal, or suggestion, declined, he had now to consider what seemed to be the best course for Buller and himself to pursue. Buller proposed attacking again, but asked his opinion. He came to the conclusion that they had better play a waiting game, and trust to the advance of Lord Roberts rather than try to force matters. To Lord Roberts he replied through Buller:—

Many thanks from self and force for message and congratulations. By sacrificing rest of my horses I can hold out for six weeks, keeping my guns efficiently horsed, and 1000 men mounted on moderately efficient horses. I should like

to publish your intention to advance *viâ* Orange Free State as early as you can permit me to do so. It will encourage my garrison, and will be certain to reach and discourage Orange Free State men.

And to Buller he answered :—

No. 56P, *28th January.*—Thanks for your No. 123 of to-day. It is most provoking about losing Spion Kop. I think it would be better if you stick to bombardment and slow progress by something like sap rather than commit yourself to another definite attack. Information, which I believe correct, says Boers are discouraged by superiority of your armament, and say they cannot stand it. Keep them, therefore, in their trenches, and bombard them as heavily as you can. I don't think they will stand it long. I trust to your preventing them from throwing their strength on me. I will hold on six weeks more by sacrificing many of my horses, and that period of bombardment, coupled with Roberts' advance, will make Orange Free State men, at all events, clear off. I believe your estimate of enemy's numbers here and before you may be correct, but his guns here are protected by wire entanglements and mines. Boers can, however, come here from Potgieter's in 90 minutes. In this lies their great strength. You must not let them leave you and throw their strength on me.

Buller did not accept White's view. Determined to break through if possible, he continued his attempts to force the Boer positions; and it would be difficult to show that he was wrong in so doing. But whatever Buller's action, White's duty was now clear: to husband his resources as carefully as possible, and prolong to its utmost limit the duration of the defence.

The rapidity with which the physical strength of the garrison had gone down is at first sight surprising.

By the end of January the infantry were practically unfit for use in the field. To quote Sir Frederick Maurice:—

> Even the short marches entailed by the relief of posts were already as much as many of the soldiers could manage, and that often only with many halts for rest by the way.

A month before their condition had been very different. But in truth the apparently rapid decline was natural enough. Since the outbreak of war the troops had passed through a trying time. None the better, many of them, for the confinement and discomforts of a long sea voyage, they had first had ten days or more of rough marching and fighting in the open. This had been followed by three months of siege, which entailed constant exposure and hard work on the defences, and more fighting,—once, on the 6th January, severe fighting. Towards the end of the year sickness had begun to increase with the increasing heat. The drinking water, drawn from the dirty little river, had throughout been made tolerable only by boiling and the use of filters. For some time before the end of January the rations of beef, "very hard trek ox," had been partly replaced by horseflesh; biscuit had been served out, in no large quantities, in lieu of bread; there was very little tea, coffee, sugar, or salt; and there was practically no tobacco. Little wonder, therefore, that when once the strength of the men began to fail it failed rapidly.

This was the condition of things which White had to face when it was decided that he must prepare to

hold out for another month—the men of his garrison weakening daily for want of food, and, it may be added, the horses also very short of forage, and losing strength like the men. Yet if the duration of the defence was to be extended this could only be done by making the scanty food supply last longer, that is, by decreasing the daily ration.

The first step taken in these circumstances, very reluctantly, was the sacrifice of a large part of the cavalry, which had been of so much service as a mobile reserve. Each regiment was ordered to keep only seventy-five of its best horses, for which food was to be issued. The remainder were to be turned out to graze on the dry "veldt." This left each regiment with one mounted squadron. The rest of the troopers received rifles and bayonets, and joined the infantry in the defences.

At the same time the rations for officers and men were cut down. They were still sufficient to support life, for horse-flesh was plentiful enough, but only half a pound of biscuit could be given, and an ounce and a half of sugar. Ten days later the biscuit ration was reduced by one-half, and the men became "really hungry." Lieut.-Colonel Gore, in his cheery account of the siege, writes at this time:—

> The total absence of all vegetables, butter, fat, jam, "drink," and smoke, and almost total absence of bread, and all the thousand little things one is accustomed to, told severely on officers and men, and nearly all were looking decidedly pinched and wan by now; many complained of great weakness, and felt quite "done" after a short walk of a mile or so.

The regiments too were very short of men from sickness.

At this time we were showing in our weekly return that the officers, N.C.O.'s, and men were getting "no nights in bed."

And Gore's regiment was a mounted one, the 5th Dragoon Guards.

This diary of a regimental officer, written at the time, is useful in giving an idea of the work which the men of the garrison had to do, and of their condition. It may be desirable to quote a few more passages.

Orders were received to-day that we were to bivouac every night in future on Observation Hill East.

This was an entirely new departure, and we are now in for a purely infantry *rôle!* However, we were all ready to take up anything, and at dusk walked out to our new post. We had to build two forts on the summits of two small hill-tops in the crest line. They were made eight yards long, four yards wide, four and a half feet high, and from five feet at the bottom to three feet at the top in thickness. The ground on these hills is just like iron; it is studded with large iron stones of various sizes embedded in it. It is impossible to say, when one starts to loosen a stone, how big it is underground; sometimes, after ten minutes' work with a crowbar, a given stone has to be abandoned as an impossible job. The weight of these stones, too, was very great, and the labour of collecting them, carrying, and building them up in the moonlight was very heavy. The men and officers worked hard from 7 P.M. to 11 P.M., and went to lie down on the hillside for the night tired, after some very heavy work, considering the weak state into which insufficient food had brought them.

Feb. 13*th*. . . . We went out again at night, and completed the two forts begun last night. A heavy job, well over. The men are very weak, and not able for heavy work, which in ordinary times they would think nothing of. All worked excellently, however. . . .

Feb. 14*th*. . . . During the following days all ranks were busy morning and evening working on our new "Green Horse Post," and putting it in a thorough state of defence; . . . all ranks entered into the spirit of their new duties with the greatest zest and alacrity, and felt proud that, after having had one successful dart at the Boers at Elandslaagte in their proper *rôle* of cavalry, they were now entrusted with part of the outer line of the Ladysmith defences, where they might have another opportunity of trying to do their duty, this time dismounted. . . .

The 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th of February passed in this manner, more or less quiet, dull, listless, hungry days! . . .

But while we have only minor ills to bear, sad reports come from the Hospital Camp at Intombi. For three more of our poor weak comrades the long-deferred relief of Ladysmith has tarried too long!

Feb. 11*th*, *Sunday*.—Church parade service, for the dismounted regiment, at 6.30 A.M., at the Naval Brigade camp (near ours), and in company with our gallant friends the Bluejackets. The Rev. A. V. C. Hordern officiated, and gave a short service, as we stood in a nullah out of sight of Bulwana, for fear the gunner there might forget it was the Sabbath, as he has done before! Mr Hordern has been out at Intombi camp, and only returned thence last evening. He himself has been ill with dysentery, poor fellow, and is still very weak, but at his duty. He gave us sad accounts of our comrades now in hospital at Intombi. The poor fellows are suffering a great deal from dysentery and enteric and intermittent fever. The cruel part of it all is that there is scarcely any of the all-necessary milk to give them, and they have to do the best they can almost upon the ordinary ration which

we are getting. When once a man gets into a weak state, it is so difficult to pull him round again without giving him any good nourishing food. Of course all the tinned milk, whisky, brandy, arrowroot, and everything that would be of value for sick men, was "commandeered" by our authorities at the beginning of the siege, to be kept for the sick and wounded; so they are getting all there was, and is, available. Mr Hordern says that the current state of affairs shows a very marked influence on the state of the sick and the daily number of deaths. If Buller's guns are heard nearer, or if any good news is given them, they cheer up wonderfully, and say they feel better; but if they have bad, or no news at all, the death rate is certain to be heavier on that day: they die as much from sheer weariness and weakness and from want of food as from the diseases to which the deaths are actually attributed.

This was a melancholy state of things; but, on the other hand, no record of the siege of Ladysmith would be just if it failed to bring out what Sir Frederick Maurice has called "the most striking feature of the whole defence, and that on which its ultimate success essentially depended"—namely, the skill and energy with which Colonel Ward and the officers of the Army Service Corps and Indian Commissariat, under his orders, utilised the meagre resources at their disposal, and kept the troops supplied with food of some kind. Colonel Ward had done invaluable work at the beginning of the war in collecting supplies at Ladysmith, on the chance of a siege, while the railway was open; and his services during the siege were equally invaluable. To no man in the command did White owe, or feel, more gratitude.

As the siege continued [White wrote in his despatch of the 23rd March 1900] and the supply difficulties constantly increased, Colonel Ward's cheerful ingenuity met every difficulty with ever fresh expedients. He is unquestionably the very best supply officer I have ever met, and to his resource, foresight, and inventiveness the successful defence of Ladysmith for so long a period is very largely due.

The work of Ward and his officers is described in detail by White in this despatch and by Sir Frederick Maurice in his 'History.' Indian corn was collected and utilised for food by crushing and grinding in mills belonging to the Natal Railway. While the slaughter cattle were still sound, many of them were converted into "biltong," as a reserve, in case disease should break out. All dairy cows were requisitioned, and a system was set up for the supply of milk to the sick and wounded. The feeding of the whole civilian population, several thousand in number, was taken over and organised. The muddy water of the Klip river, which, after the cutting of the main by the enemy at the beginning of the siege, formed the only water supply, was purified by boiling and the use of Berkefeld filters; and when the filters became useless for want of alum, three condensers were improvised, as also a system of filtration through sheets sprinkled with wood ashes. The flesh of horses which could no longer be fed was worked up into "chevril," a strong meat soup, and this was issued nightly to the troops; a condensed form of it was prepared for use in the hospitals, in place of the meat extracts,

which had come to an end; a jelly, like calves' foot jelly, was also made for the sick and wounded; "chevril paste," or potted meat, supplemented the flesh ration, and was much appreciated; "neat's-foot oil" was extracted for lubricating the heavy naval ordnance; finally, a sausage factory was established, which, White says, "converted the horse-flesh into excellent sausages." Everything, in fact, was done which Colonel Ward and his officers could devise to increase and improve the food supply, and but for their untiring exertions it could not have held out nearly as long as it did.

Meanwhile Buller, thoroughly convinced that to keep "pegging away," as he put it, at the Boer forces was the only chance of saving Ladysmith, and supported in that course by the enthusiastic eagerness of his troops, had decided to force the Tugela at Vaal Krantz, some miles nearer to Ladysmith than Potgieter's. The attempt was made, and the river duly crossed; but, after some sharp fighting, it became evident that the Boer position to the north of the river was as strong as ever, and on the 7th February Buller came to the conclusion that a further advance on that line was inadvisable. He therefore withdrew his force to the south of the river again. But he had by no means abandoned his resolve to go on "pegging away," and the message informing White of his failure to get through by Vaal Krantz announced also that he meant to try again elsewhere. Beaten off in December at Colenso, the centre of the Boer mountain

line, and now repulsed with severe loss in two attempts to break in to the west of Colenso,[1] he had determined to march back right across the Boer front and try an attack on the eastern section of their line. As before explained, an attack by the east had been contemplated at the beginning, before the fight at Colenso, but had been considered undesirable because it involved a flank march over broken ground covered with bush, where his troops, new to the country, would have had to force their way under great difficulties, and where, moreover, the Ladysmith garrison could not have given much help. Now Buller's troops had learnt their work; and, far from being disheartened by their repulses, were not only as eager for fighting as ever, but much better trained for it. This altered the situation. Buller therefore signalled to White on the 7th February—

The enemy is too strong for me here, and though I could force the position, it would be at great loss. . . . My plan is to slip back to Chieveley, take Hlangwane, the Boer position south of the Tugela and east of Colenso, and the next night try and take Bulwana Hill from the south. Can you think of anything better? I find I cannot take my guns and trains through these mountains. I hope to be at Hlangwane on Saturday. Keep it dark.

The failure at Vaal Krantz brought fresh disappointment to White and his troops.

For the third time [writes Maurice] the hopes of the straitened garrison were deferred. The prospects were gloomy in the extreme. The condition of the town . . . grew worse

[1] At Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz he had lost 2000 men.

daily. On the 9th the biscuit ration was reduced by one-half and the grain ration discontinued, even for the seventy-five horses per regiment which had been retained. Of the horses out at grass, no less than seventy per diem were being killed for food. Most alarming of all was the increasing feebleness of the soldiers still in the ranks. Practically unable to march, or even to use their weapons in a long day's fighting, they seemed alike at the mercy of an assault and unequal to any co-operative movement with the army of the Tugela. Only their spirit continued to burn brightly in their wasting frames, and this, communicating its fervour to the civilians, drew no less than 900 men from the ranks of the railway employés, transport riders, and artisans in the town to answer a call for volunteers made at this time. They were enrolled as a battalion, which took its place in the defences.

The Boers, naturally enough, were much elated by their success at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, which they celebrated by a searchlight bombardment of the town. For some days past there had been reports that, after a conference between the Presidents of the two Republics, orders had been issued for another serious attack on Ladysmith; and White had made all arrangements for meeting it, and for informing Buller by rocket signals, though Buller could have done little to help. It now seemed probable that the attack would come at once. But, though fully aware of the weak state of the garrison, the enemy had not yet forgotten the 6th of January. They shrank from the losses which must be incurred in carrying the defences by assault, and contented themselves with an attempt to flood Ladysmith by damming the Klip river near the foot of Bulwana. This

scheme, suggested by Krantz, the commander of the German corps, was expected to have great results in damaging the British magazines and cutting off Cæsar's Camp from the remainder of the defences. It failed entirely, as White had told Buller from the first that it would fail. The river did not rise at all, and no annoyance was caused. Krantz, indeed, rendered good service to the hard-pressed garrison by diverting the minds of the enemy from the bolder course; for an assault resolutely pushed home would have had a good chance of success.

On receipt of Buller's message of the 7th, White had replied :—

"Cannot offer suggestions, as do not know country, or where you propose to cross Tugela. I could help at Bulwana. The closer to Ladysmith you can establish yourself the better chance we shall have here."

White himself had, of course, no personal knowledge of the country in which Buller was to operate; but at first sight it seems strange that there should have been no information available in Ladysmith. The explanation, however, is simple enough. There had never been a survey on a large scale, partly because money was not available, partly for fear of arousing suspicion in the Republics; and British officers stationed in Ladysmith before the war were ignorant of the country, for the attitude of the neighbouring farmers was such that they were not allowed to go off the roads. General Hunter stated in his evidence before the Commission that "there

was not a single officer in Ladysmith who could tell you anything." There was only one who had been even on the Bulwana Hill, four or five miles off.

For some days after Buller's message announcing his intention to move eastward no further news was received from him; but on the 13th February it became evident from the movements of the Boers that they were closely watching his march, and preparing to meet him in strength. White therefore signalled to him on that date that there was considerable movement among the Boer camps, and that some of the enemy were moving south, some eastward. "We anxiously await news from you."

No answer to this message was received for three or four days; but in the meantime Buller forwarded one from Lord Roberts which rejoiced the hearts of the garrison. It was as follows:—

I have entered Orange Free State with a large force, specially strong in Cavalry, Artillery, and Mounted Infantry. Inform your troops of this, and tell them from me I hope the result of next few days may lead to pressure on Ladysmith being materially lessened.

This was indeed welcome news, and a day or two later the Ladysmith garrison heard with delight that some of the enemy were beginning to move northwards. A body of not less than 2000 men with waggons was seen to march off towards the Drakensberg passes, setting fire as they went to some Natal farms. The Free State men were evidently getting alarmed at the invasion of their own country.

Nevertheless there was as yet no general movement of retreat on the part of the enemy. On the contrary, they were still working hard upon the Klip river dam to the eastward, and parties of them were still marching south towards Buller. Moreover Buller telegraphed on the 16th February that according to his information 300 Germans had joined the Boers round Ladysmith, and that White was to be attacked before the 26th. White replied:—

I think another attack here quite possible. Have strengthened defences, and will try to give good account of ourselves, but men are on very short rations, and are consequently very weak.

He evidently did not feel confident as to the result if an attack were made. The powers of resistance of the garrison were very nearly worn out, and unless speedily relieved Ladysmith might yet fall. Nor did there seem to be any prospect of speedy relief, for in warning White of the coming attack on Ladysmith, Buller had added that he had heard he was to be attacked at the same time. And though the sound of his guns was now to be heard in Ladysmith it was still distant. He was still to the south of the Tugela, no nearer than he had been two months before. The Boer fortress north of the river was still untouched. Indeed the enemy had not even been pushed back behind their moat.

I am engaged [Buller signalled on the 16th February] in trying to turn the enemy out of the position he holds south of Tugela river and east of Colenso.

The relieving force had seemed much closer when the garrison could watch their shells bursting on Spion Kop and the neighbouring hills to the westward. At least they had forced the river then. Now the whole work had still to be done.

In trying to form for oneself an idea of the situation as it appeared to White and his troops at this time, it is necessary to put out of one's mind all knowledge of what afterwards happened. What they knew then, on the 16th February, was that although Lord Roberts had crossed the Free State border, two or three hundred miles away, the enemy in Natal seemed as determined as ever to take Ladysmith; and that the only British force which could possibly relieve them, before starvation forced them to surrender, was, after suffering three complete repulses, exactly where it had been before it made its first attempt. And meanwhile they had become so weak from sickness and hunger that another attack upon them would be very hard to meet. It was not a hopeful prospect.

But during the next few days the situation rapidly altered. It was known from Buller's messages that he was to attack Cingolo and Monte Cristo, two heights to the south-east, visible from some points of the Ladysmith defences. On the 17th February shells were seen bursting over them,

and on the 18th, to the delight of the garrison, Buller's attacking lines were seen to roll up the heights and crown the summits amid a great hum of firing.[1]

[1] Maurice.

Cingolo and Monte Cristo were south of the Tugela, but the way in which they had been attacked and taken was promising, and on the 19th White signalled to Buller his congratulations "on your important success." His message went on :—

Let me know when you intend attacking position north of Tugela, and whether you will come *viâ* Bulwana or Colenso road, and I will try and co-operate.

On the 21st February Buller replied that he was engaged in pushing his way through by Pieter's, that is, by the more easterly road.

I think there is only a rearguard in front of me. The large Boer laager under Bulwana was removed last night. I hope to be with you to-morrow night. You might help by working north and stopping some of the enemy getting away.

This was glorious news. Nevertheless White, accustomed by now to disappointment, and well knowing that Buller's advance lay through a very difficult mass of hills, was by no means convinced that relief was at hand. Buller seemed to have got across the river, or to be certain of being able to cross it; but he had twice crossed it before, and yet found a further advance impossible. And, so far as White could judge, Buller's belief that the enemy was in retreat had no sufficient foundation. On the contrary, Boer reinforcements by rail from the north had been seen getting out at a station a few miles from Ladysmith, and during the last few days bodies of mounted men had marched south

by Bulwana. White sent a message informing Buller of this, and a second message which ran :—

> We can detect no signs of enemy retreating; all indications point the other way.

The Boer bombardment of Ladysmith, it may be observed, had actually increased in severity.

White's doubts were strengthened on the 22nd by a message from Buller :—

> I find I was premature in fixing actual date of my entry into Ladysmith, as I am meeting with more opposition than I expected, but I am progressing.

White's native scouts had indeed reported that the Free State Boers on the west of Ladysmith had gone; but the Transvaal men opposite Buller were apparently as numerous and resolute as ever, and his advance, if advance there was, seemed to be very slow, nor did the bombardment of Ladysmith show any signs of slackening. Moreover Buller telegraphed :—

> Can only hold Monte Cristo temporarily. Shall endeavour to open communication with you further on.

This message, received on the 22nd, was disquieting; and as no definite information came in during the next three days, while on the 25th the sound of firing to the southward died away, it was impossible not to fear that Buller had once more been repulsed, and that the hope of speedy relief must be abandoned. On the 26th firing was heard again, but at a distance, and as the day was cloudy no

signals could be made. The rations of the garrison, which had been increased, were again reduced to quarter scale—that is, to "one-quarter of a pound of biscuit and three ounces of mealie meal"—and the hungry troops could only believe that the Tugela fight had ended in disaster.[1]

It had not ended in disaster, and on the 27th the firing began again, swelling to "an incessant and tremendous uproar." Buller was taking Pieter's Hill. But in the evening, though lamp communication was established with Cingolo, Buller, uncertain as to the extent of his success, and unwilling to arouse false hopes, said nothing more definite than that he was "doing well." He also signalled :—

I think you will be able to help me, but I am not close enough to you yet. I shall communicate with you later on.[2]

Thus, even on the very last night of the siege, White and his troops were still in suspense as to their relief. The 27th February was "Majuba Day," the anniversary of the Boer victory nineteen years before, and the garrison certainly had no reason to suppose that their besiegers were contemplating retreat. The gunners on Bulwana celebrated the day by entertaining a party of Dutch ladies, for whose *beaux yeux* they dropped shells upon Wagon Hill and other distant parts of the defences, making excellent practice. In the evening came news that

[1] Gore says the reduction was made on the 27th, but Maurice's 'History' seems to indicate the 26th.

[2] White's collection of messages has nothing about Buller's "doing well," but Maurice is probably correct on this point.

Lord Roberts had captured General Cronje and his force at Paardeberg, and a wild burst of cheering went round the defences; but at midnight the enemy opened a heavy rifle fire, which continued for half an hour, from every part of the investing lines. And on the morning of the 28th the troops awoke to "the usual dreary, dull, hungry routine," never suspecting that their long trial was at an end.

Yet the end had come. As day broke and the morning mists cleared away, the men in the defences, looking out across the open country, saw every road leading northward covered with long lines of waggons, artillery, and horsemen; and a few hours later, up on Bulwana, the Boer gunners, having fired one parting round from the great piece which had so long tormented Ladysmith, began to make preparations for removing it. At noon Buller signalled:—

> Have thoroughly beaten enemy; believe them to be in full retreat. Have sent cavalry to ascertain which way they have gone.

Five hours later the head of Buller's cavalry was seen near Intombi, and before dark Lord Dundonald with 300 troopers rode into Ladysmith. The siege was over.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MEANING OF LADYSMITH.

WHEN, on the 1st March 1900, Buller himself entered Ladysmith, White's work in South Africa was at an end. His last act as commander of a separate force had been to send out a pursuing column to harass the retreating enemy. Both men and horses were too weak to do fast work, but they shelled and captured some of the enemy's camps. Then, on Buller's arrival, the column was recalled. Having many years' experience of the Boers, he thought that any attempt to force their rearguards would be merely a waste of men; and "Sir Redvers Buller was in command."

White had now laid down the responsible position which he had held for five months, since his arrival in Natal; and it may be well to consider here, at the cost of some repetition, what the result of his tenure of command had been.

It has been shown in an earlier chapter that when he sailed for South Africa in September 1899 he had no illusions as to the part which he would have to play in case of war. There was no question of his

attacking and conquering the Boer Republics. It had been settled that if war broke out Buller was to be sent to the Cape with a large force, and that the conduct of offensive operations was to be in his hands. White was simply to hold Natal, while Forestier Walker held Cape Colony, until Buller arrived to take supreme command; and the intention was that Buller with his Army Corps should then attack and subdue the Republics, probably by invading their territory from the southward; White with his comparatively small force co-operating no doubt, if possible, from the eastern side of the vast theatre of war, but in a subordinate capacity. It was not then known, though it was guessed, what the Boer plan of campaign was likely to be. There could be no doubt that at the outset the enemy would be largely superior in numbers; and it seemed probable, therefore, that they would strike at once, while the British forces both in Cape Colony and Natal were weak. But whether they would throw their united weight upon the force in Natal, or upon the force in the Cape, or try to attack on both sides simultaneously, no one could say.

When war did break out it very soon became clear that they meant to throw the bulk of their troops into Natal. They had unwisely diverted a considerable part of their strength for secondary operations against Mafeking and Kimberley; but the very day after war was declared the Commander-in-Chief of the allied Boer forces was on the Natal border with about half of the total number of Burghers mobilised, and

no secret was made of the fact that they hoped with one rush to sweep Natal, from the northern border to the sea. That first stroke delivered, and the British force in Natal captured, or completely beaten and driven under the guns of their ships, the combined strength of the Republics was to be thrown upon Cape Colony, where thousands of their sympathisers would by this time have risen in response to their victory; and the conquering armies, gathering numbers at every step, were to sweep down to Capetown as they had swept down to Durban. If, stirred by their victorious rush in Natal, foreign nations came in on their side, so much the better; but, with or without foreign help, the English would be driven into the sea, and the "vierkleur" would float over a free South Africa.

It was a fine conception, and there seemed to be no reason why it should fail of success. When war was declared nothing stood between the Boer armies and the fulfilment of their dream but the hastily gathered British force in Natal—hardly a third of their numbers. In Cape Colony there were only a few scattered detachments, barely half the strength of the Natal force. British reinforcements of any value could not arrive in South Africa for at least a month. And the Natal force was within easy striking distance, very few days' march from the Boer Headquarters. Surely in much less than a month their rapidly moving mounted swarms would have enveloped and destroyed it, and all South Africa would be in a blaze of revolt.

That this was no fantastic idea the Boers soon showed. Met by a fighting opponent, who was determined to foil their enveloping scheme by striking out at them the moment he got them within reach, they suffered two sharp defeats in the field; yet, within three weeks of their crossing the border, they had pressed him back into Ladysmith, with the loss of a tenth of his force, and surrounded him. All Northern Natal was in their hands, and to some of the best heads among them the whole colony seemed to be at their mercy; for they could either overwhelm Ladysmith by direct assault, or, leaving behind them a force sufficient to prevent its garrison from breaking out, push on with the remainder of their army to the southward, where there was practically nothing to stop them. As they had a numerical superiority in fighting men of perhaps two to one, a superiority which was increased by their power of rapid movement, with an artillery also superior in weight and range, if not in numbers, either course seemed within their powers. Possibly this was the case. Many of the Boers, it is said, were confident of their ability to take Ladysmith in a hand-to-hand fight; and many more, including Louis Botha, advocated pressing on at once to Maritzburg and Durban. But, happily, if the Boers were strong enough to do either, the fact was not understood by their responsible leaders, or by the outer world.

And possibly the Boers were not strong enough. This was George White's view when he decided to accept investment in Ladysmith. He believed that,

though unsuccessful in preventing the junction of their forces, or inflicting upon them a decisive defeat in the field, he had by his vigorous fighting during the first fortnight of the war implanted in the hearts of the brave but cautious Burghers a wholesome respect for the fighting qualities of the British soldier.

Their easy successes in the former war of 1881, followed not by any counter-stroke, but by a peace which seemed to them a complete surrender on the part of Great Britain, had led them to enter upon the present war with the greatest confidence. They believed, as White said, that they would be able to kill without being killed, and that after a few defeats the British Government would give in again as it had done before. Now they had learned at Talana and Elandslaagte that British troops well handled were a formidable enemy, especially at close quarters; and though the lesson had been somewhat discounted by their success at Nicholson's Nek, it had not been lost upon them. Moreover, their leader, Joubert, though a brave and chivalrous antagonist, was known to be a very prudent one. To quote Admiral Mahan:—

> His idea appears always to have been to act within limits of safety, to consider self-preservation—the preservation, that is, of his own forces—more important than the destruction of the enemy.

A due consideration of these facts, and others, had led White to the conclusion that the Boer armies were not capable either of taking Ladysmith by assault or of masking it and sweeping down over the south

of the colony. Ladysmith would, he believed, "act as a shield to the rest of Natal."

> I was confident of holding out at Ladysmith as long as might be necessary, and I saw clearly that as long as I maintained myself there I could occupy the great mass of the Boer armies, and prevent them sending more than small flying columns south of the Tugela.

And whatever the Boers might have done, it is certain that in the actual event White's forecast of what they would do turned out to be correct.

The Boer Commander-in-Chief, Joubert, at first refused to let any of his men cross the river. Later, after the abortive attack of the 9th November, he did himself attempt a raid to the south of the Tugela, with a body of 4000 men, and one or two smaller bodies also made raids; but throughout, for four long months, the mass of his forces remained in front of Ladysmith. Twice during that time they endeavoured to carry it by assault, but both times unsuccessfully, and they never ventured to march away to the southward, leaving Ladysmith in their rear.

Before half the four months had passed Natal had been so reinforced from England that it was no longer in danger; and before White's starving garrison was relieved by Buller a large British army was nearing the capital of the Free State. Ladysmith, to use Mahan's words again, had been to the Boers "like a dead weight round the neck of a swimmer struggling for life under other disadvantages." It had held the bulk of the enemy's forces inactive, or at least

stationary, for a hundred and twenty days, while the British forces were pouring into South Africa at the rate of a thousand men a day. When White, "very sad" at the loss of his two regiments at Nicholson's Nek, but clear in his purpose and confident of the issue, retired behind the line of defences he had carefully prepared beforehand, the whole of the British troops in South Africa, outside those defences, did not number ten thousand men. When Dundonald rode into the town, on the 28th February, much more than ten times that number were facing the Boer armies, and all chance of eventual success in the war was at an end for the two Republics.

That White understood throughout what he was doing cannot be doubted. At the beginning of the war he hoped, and tried, to inflict upon the forces invading Natal a decisive defeat in the field; but, having regard to his numbers and theirs, he foresaw the probability of his failing in this endeavour, and set to work at once to provision and fortify Ladysmith. When, in accordance with his forecast, he found himself obliged to fall back upon the stronghold he had made ready, he still hoped to be able to strike out at times if opportunity arose; but in any case he was resolved to maintain himself in the most forward position he could hold, and to prevent the advance of the enemy beyond that point. His force, though not strong enough to beat the enemy in the open, was yet too strong to be passed by,—

incapable, doubtless, of taking the field against the vastly superior numbers confronting it, but most capable, by numbers and position, of embarrassing any onward movement of the enemy.

It would lie directly upon their line of communications.

To secure these it would be necessary, before forward movement, either to carry the place by assault, suitably prepared and executed, thus sweeping it out of the way for good, or else to keep before it a detachment of sufficient strength to check any effort seriously to interrupt the communications. But this would be to divide the Boer forces, to which doubtless Joubert did not feel his numbers adequate. This was the important—the decisive—part played by Ladysmith in the campaign.[1]

And this, as I have shown, is precisely what White was aiming at. On the 31st October he had telegraphed to Buller :—

I have the greatest confidence in holding Ladysmith for as long as necessary. . . . I intend to contain as many Boers as possible round Ladysmith, and I believe they will not go south without making an attempt on Ladysmith.

On the same date he telegraphed to the Governor of Natal :—

My intention is to hold Ladysmith, make attacks on the enemy's position whenever possible, and retain the greatest number of the enemy here.

And even when the main purpose of his stand at Ladysmith had been accomplished, and Natal was

[1] Mahan.

comparatively safe, he still felt the great importance of prolonging his defence of the place to the last extremity, both to save the Empire the discredit of its fall, and to hold before its defences the best of the Boer armies. On the 23rd January he writes to his wife :—

I was right when, months ago, I said Ladysmith would be the strategical point of the war.

And on the 3rd February :—

I believe the Boers have from the first so set their hearts on conquering Natal that I believe they will hold out here to the very end. They say—so our spies tell us—they have come here " to conquer or to die." I will therefore do all in my power to keep the English flag flying here as long as I can.

There is no need to claim for White greater credit than he deserves. Lord Roberts, and not White, broke the power of the Boer Republics, and brought the war to a successful issue. But Lord Roberts came to South Africa with a large army. Before any part of that army had arrived in the country, when the Boers greatly outnumbered the British, and their main strength had been thrown upon Natal, one British force stood between them and the accomplishment of their purpose. The fall of Kimberley or Mafeking would not have seriously affected the course of the war. The capture or entire defeat of White's force would have meant without a doubt the conquest of Natal down to the sea. The guns of the British ships might possibly have saved the port of Durban

itself, but the Boers would have been all round it. And in all probability they would, not many weeks afterwards, have been all round Capetown. The task of the British, even if no foreign powers had intervened—and the attitude of foreign powers was not friendly—would then have been to reconquer South Africa from the seaboard. Against an enemy as brave and tenacious in defence as the Boers, flushed with victory, and backed by great numbers of the Dutch colonists, that would have been a formidable task. If the whole strength of the Empire had been put forth it would probably have been accomplished, but it would not have been easily accomplished.

Mahan writes:—

> Probably no single incident of the war has been more determinative of final issues than the tenure of Ladysmith.

And then, after "an examination of the relation borne by this single factor to the whole," he goes on as follows:—

> Discussion has been thus long, because, in the author's judgment, White's action in shutting himself up in the place, and the admirable tenacity of himself and of the garrison in their resistance, were the shaping factors in a contest the ultimate result of which was probably certain in any event, but which in feature and occurrence would have been very different had Ladysmith either not been occupied or proved incapable of protracted resistance.

This is a temperate statement of the case; but it is sufficient to show Mahan's opinion of the great importance of White's share in the war. And two years

after the close of the siege, hearing from a friend that White had seen and appreciated his book, Mahan wrote to him on the subject. The letter speaks of

the warm sympathy and admiration with which I followed your course not only amid the imperfect day to day reports, while the siege continued, but as I studied the fuller reports at a later day when preparing my brief account.

It goes on :—

I have had occasion to renew the public expression of my profound conviction of the correctness and importance of your decision, as well as of the heroic tenacity of your defence. . . . The fact that the fortunes of the war, through a protracted critical period, hinged solely upon your personal constancy, will, I am persuaded, more and more through all subsequent time, identify your name with the final success of the Empire in this distinctively imperial contest.

It has seemed desirable, when treating of Ladysmith, to dwell upon passages in Mahan's book, and in this spontaneous letter, rather than upon the opinions of others, because Mahan was not only a profound student of strategy, but a critic whose views on the subject were free from all bias. English writers on the war, and English soldiers who had borne a share in it, were not in such an exceptional position of mental detachment as the distinguished American. Therefore, though it would have been easy to quote valuable opinions regarding the decision to hold Ladysmith, and the result of that decision upon the course of the war, I have preferred to quote Mahan.


Defence Commanders proving, each to his own entire satisfaction, that the two 6·3 inch Howitzers are absolutely necessary in his particular Section
C.M.D

Caricature from 'The Leaguer of Ladysmith' of Sir George White in Council at Ladysmith.

To put the matter in a few words, George White did not conquer the Boers, a task for which his force was far too small; but by occupying and holding Ladysmith during the first and most critical phase of the war, he stopped the Boer rush, in the success of which lay their only hope of ultimate victory. Their plan of campaign, which might have had incalculable results, was wrecked on the hills round Ladysmith. To use his own words, he "kept the flag flying" until the strength of England could be brought to bear. That was the great service which he rendered to his country.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETURN TO ENGLAND.

1900.

THE morning of the 1st of March brought to White a shower of telegrams congratulating him and his troops upon their successful defence. Queen Victoria had sent for him to "say good-bye" before he sailed for South Africa six months before, and had done much to help and comfort him after the mishap at Nicholson's Nek by her messages of sympathy and confidence. She had not forgotten to send to the beleaguered garrison her Christmas greetings. Now she was the first to convey to them, with characteristic warmth of expression, her congratulations upon their relief, and their conduct. Her message ran as follows:—

> Thank God that you and all those with you are safe after your long and trying siege, borne with such heroism, and congratulate you and all under you from the bottom of my heart. Trust you are all not very much exhausted.

It was a woman's message as well as a Queen's,

and deepened, if anything could deepen, the affectionate loyalty with which White always regarded her.

Other messages followed in rapid succession: from the heavily burdened Secretary for War, Lord Lansdowne; from White's old chief, Lord Roberts, now advancing into the Free State; from Capetown and Maritzburg and Durban, and every part of British South Africa; from "all Scottish soldiers"; from the Army in India; from the Channel Squadron; from the "maiden city," Londonderry, and many other cities and boroughs in Great Britain; from Canada, and Australia, and New Zealand, and Newfoundland; from the British communities in China and Peru. Lord Roberts had telegraphed:—

> The prayers that have been offered up throughout the Empire have been heard. From one end of it to the other there will be general rejoicing.

And so it proved. White must have been more than human if he had not felt his heart swell with pride. But all he said, so the story is told, when the soldiers and people of Ladysmith crowded round him, cheering madly, was this:—

> I thank you men, one and all, from the bottom of my heart, for the help and support you have given to me, and I shall always acknowledge it to the end of my life. It grieved me to have to cut your rations, but I promise you that I will not do it again. I thank God we have kept the flag flying.

The great burden of responsibility and anxiety which he had borne for five months had now begun to tell upon him seriously. During the last weeks

of the siege he had suffered at times from fever, and two days after the relief he broke down. The last sentence in the long letter to his wife from which several passages have been quoted—it could not be despatched during the siege—was written in pencil on the 10th March :—

> Struck down by severe attack of fever. Cannot write more—have wired. Don't be anxious, dear.

Fortunately he had by his side a skilful medical officer and devoted friend, Surgeon-Major Treherne, who had been with him during his term as Commander-in-Chief in India, and throughout the siege; but for a fortnight he was really ill; and the result, according to Ian Hamilton, who was also attacked in the same way, was that both were left "regular skeletons." Neither of them had much to spare at the best of times. Hamilton, a much younger man, was soon fit for duty again; but White, now nearly sixty-five years of age, was forced to recognise that for some months to come he would be unable to take the field. Though Lord Roberts had offered him a command, he felt that in his present state of health he could not stand the hard work and exposure, and was therefore not justified in accepting the offer. Acting on Treherne's advice he applied for leave to England.

Before the end of March he arrived at Capetown, accompanied by Hamilton, and was met there by his son, who was serving with the Gordon Highlanders.

Lord Bobs, "God love him" [he writes to his friend, Miss Warrender], with characteristic grace, thoughtfulness, and kindness, sent Jack here to pay me a visit.

And "Lord Bobs" had also taken care of the men who had done so much to help White in the Natal campaign.

General Ian Hamilton has a good billet, and also my exceedingly able Secretary and loyal and good friend, Colonel Duff.

"Lord Bobs" always took care of a good soldier, for he knew that to do so was to serve the best interests of the country. Immediately after the relief he had telegraphed asking for Hamilton, Ward, and Rawlinson, if White could spare them.

Lord Roberts had promised White a great reception from every one in England.

I am sure [Hamilton wrote to Lady White] he will get this, and I am equally sure no man ever deserved it more. He has proved himself once more a most gallant and splendid General. All through what was really a most trying time he kept his spirits up and insisted on everyone else keeping their spirits up likewise. No one would ever have ventured to utter the word surrender within earshot of Head Quarters, and from him radiated all our courage and patience, such as they were, during a period which has left its mark for good or evil on most of our characters and minds.

From the time of his farewell to the garrison of Ladysmith, White had passed through "a series of *ovations*," for Natal knew well to whom the colony owed its safety. These, as he wrote to his brother,

were "not altogether joy with a temperature of 103°," but, coming from the loyal people he had shielded from invasion, they were deeply appreciated by him. He received a great welcome from Capetown also; and, though still very weak and ill, he was determined to show the gratitude he felt for it.

The people of Capetown had during the last six months felt the war so near them, and had been forced to apprehend so clearly the facts of the situation, that their statements are of value. In the course of an address presented to White on the 27th March by the mayor and councillors of the city was the following passage:—

> As loyal subjects of Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen Empress, we delight to honour the Commander and the small but gallant army but for whose timely arrival and stalwart resistance of the enemy, who were greatly superior in numbers and in warlike appliances, the invaders would assuredly have effected their purpose of completely overrunning the sister colony of Natal, and would doubtless have delivered a vigorous attack upon Cape Colony also, thereby imposing far greater hardships and losses than those already sustained before Her Majesty's reinforcements could have arrived in sufficient numbers to afford succour to the loyal inhabitants of the Colonies. We tender our grateful thanks to you and your brave men for having stood in the breach.

That was what all South Africa clearly saw, that during the critical period of the war, when the British were weak in numbers, and the successful invasion of the Colonies by a superior enemy was imminent, White and his troops had "stood in the breach."

White's reply is of comparatively small importance,

for that was the real point, the recognition by the men on the spot of the great service done by the holding of Ladysmith. But perhaps as an illustration of White's attitude whenever he had to speak on this subject, it may be well to touch upon his remarks. After thanking his hearers on behalf of the garrison he had had the honour to command, he went on to speak in the warmest terms of Penn Symons, of French, of Ian Hamilton, of his "gallant rescuer," Buller, of General Joubert, "a soldier and a gentleman," who had throughout treated him "with every concession of humanity and civilisation." Then he spoke of the Naval detachment, and of the Colonial volunteers, who were the "eyes and ears of the force" from the beginning of the campaign. Of one Colonial corps he had the courage and honesty to say:—

> I have been a soldier of our Queen—God bless her—for now nearly fifty years, and I can confidently and sincerely say here that I never had the honour to command so fine a fighting force as the Imperial Light Horse.

The Colonial volunteers, he said, had "a higher patriotism," and "very close behind them came our own soldiers." It was characteristic of White, a soldier of the soldiers, to give the first place, when he thought it right, to men who were not professional soldiers. Many years before he had said that if he were going on service he would rather have by him Charles Bernard, a civilian, than any soldier he knew. So now, believing the Colonial

volunteer to be a better fighting man than the enlisted soldier, he did not hesitate to give honour where honour was due. Yet no one could charge him with having a low opinion of the British soldier. In this same speech he told the story how, when the Boers made "their very splendid and gallant attack" on Cæsar's Camp, an important corner of the position was held by sixteen men of the Manchester Regiment from three o'clock in the morning till sunset, when "fourteen of them lay dead across their entrenchments," and only two of them, one wounded, were left fighting. White also told how on the same day Sergeant Bozeley of the Artillery was struck by a Boer shell, which tore off one of his legs and one arm, throwing him helpless across the trail of his gun, and how from the shattered body a voice was heard to come, "Here, you men, roll me out of the way and go on working the gun." White's speech ended with some sentences which showed that though an Irishman of Scottish blood, and no one could have been more proud of being so, he had no sympathy with the local patriotism which is so sensitive about the use of the words England and the English.

England [he said] always comes out best in the hour of adversity, and this campaign has been no exception to that general rule. We are all proud of being English. England is only a little dot on the map of the world, on which we balance one point of the compass while we wheel the other leg towards the Poles to mark the confines of Greater Britain. In this case, as in many former ones, we have found that this little England is the heart of a vast system whose giant limbs

reach to the uttermost parts of the earth. So brave and so strong has proved the pulsation of that little heart that it has sent a current of English life-blood to the furthest extremity of the furthest possessions, and knit them together as one unconquerable whole.

The quaint simile of the compasses seems to have been a favourite one with White, for I see that in sending him congratulations upon the defence of Ladysmith, the Plymouth Chamber of Commerce sent him also a copy of a speech delivered by him sixteen years before, in which he had used almost the same words, dwelling also upon the strength and security of the Empire "while England and her giant sons stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder, for their common weal." In 1884 such a train of thought was not so usual as it is now.

After a few days in Capetown White sailed for England in the *Dunvegan Castle*, which arrived in Southampton on the 14th April. There, before he landed, he received a message from the Queen, ever thoughtful of the soldiers who served her :—

Wish you most heartily welcome. Trust you are better and that I soon shall have the pleasure of seeing you.

The Queen's message was an index of the enthusiastic welcome White was to receive from his countrymen. As the *Dunvegan Castle* came up to the quay a roar of cheering broke out from the ships in the river, and was taken up by the thousands who had gathered on shore. From that day forward, wherever he went, the same reception awaited him. Addresses,

swords of honour, invitations to all parts of the country and of the Empire, bore witness to the esteem in which his services were held by English-speaking people throughout the world. Perhaps, as he said, the honour done to him was far greater than he deserved. He was the first of the prominent leaders in the war who had returned to England, and the nation had just passed through a long period of defeat and suspense. It was natural enough that when success came the reaction should be vehement. But the fervour of White's reception was not wholly due to the fact that he came as a herald of victory. His personal character had impressed itself upon the minds and hearts of his countrymen. The courage and dash with which he had attacked a superior enemy in the field, the chivalry he had shown in taking upon himself all blame for defeat, the steadfastness with which he had held out when shut up and besieged, all these had been recognised; and now the admiration which they had called out was increased by the unfailing modesty with which he bore himself under a storm of popular applause that might well have turned his head.

It did not do that, but it was pleasant to him. He knew when he left South Africa that some of his measures had been sharply criticised, and he expected that on arrival in England he would find it necessary to justify his action in certain respects, if not to defend himself against severe attack. He was confident of his ability to do so, and he faced the prospect without any fear; but it was a relief and

pleasure to find that, far from blaming him unfairly, every one in England seemed disposed to give him the fullest credit for all he had done, and indeed to give him, as he thought, more credit than he deserved. Some criticism was to come later, and vex him sorely; but for the time it was silent; so with health rapidly improving, and his wife and children once more about him, he spent some thoroughly happy months.

It would serve no useful purpose to describe the various complimentary ceremonials with which these months were filled; but White was specially pleased by one of them, a great dinner given in his honour by the Ulster Association in London, under the presidency of Lord Londonderry, who presented him with an address and a piece of plate, and congratulated him upon the way in which he had acted upon the motto of Ulster, "No surrender." Broad as his patriotism was, he was an Ulsterman to the core of his heart.

> If [he said] I am to be prized at a value which my own conscience tells me is much in advance of my merits, I am proud that it should occur in this assembly; for I can say most sincerely that I value the high opinion of my fellow Ulstermen more highly than that of anybody else in the world.

Yet while he dwelt upon the character and courage of an Ulsterman, Lord Ava, who was, he said, "as kind as he was brave," White did not forget to bear witness to the merits of others who had served at Ladysmith. It is interesting to see that here in London, as before in Capetown, he spoke with

special warmth of the South African forces, and in particular of the Imperial Light Horse,

who lost five commanding officers in succession—although I never saw men who wanted less leading. I think I may say they were the bravest men I ever had under my command. On the 6th January, which has been referred to as a tight day, had it not been for them Joubert might have been spending his Sunday where I spent mine.

White ended his reply by commending to the remembrance of his hearers the natives of India who, as regimental camp-followers and coolies, had also served in the siege. He told the story of one of them, a man who constituted himself the special watcher of the great Boer gun on Bulwana, and used to sit all day in the open waiting for the flash, in order that, with a shout of "Lâng Taam," he might warn the soldiers about him to take cover. At one time White gave orders that this man was not to expose himself any longer, but he appealed against the order in such moving terms that White had to give way, and for the future he carried out his self-imposed task in untroubled happiness, sheltered only, if the sun was hot, by a large cotton umbrella.

A few days later White was in Ulster itself, where a tremendous welcome awaited him. For a week the cities and villages of his native county poured out their people in tens of thousands to greet him wherever he went. It was one long triumphal progress, only marred at times by the treachery of the Irish weather. On the 18th June he writes from his own house:—

To Miss Warrender.

I have had the most magnificent and most cordial receptions everywhere. There is an enthusiasm for the integrity of the Empire that I never expected to see even in this part of Ireland.

White was specially rejoiced by this welcome, and nothing perhaps touched him so deeply as the part taken in it by Lord Dufferin, who, setting aside his own personal sorrow at the recent death of his brave son, came forward to greet his old lieutenant in public, and insisted upon receiving White and Lady White as his guests at Clandeboye.

On return to London White set about his preparations for taking up his new post. A few months before the outbreak of war he had been offered, and had accepted, the Governorship of Gibraltar. Now, his health restored by his sea voyage from the Cape and three strenuous but pleasant months in England, he felt equal to the duties of a charge which, compared with others that he had held, was not a heavy one. He would have preferred a few months of rest at home; for in the last twenty years he had not had much of it, and South Africa had tried him severely, but this would have involved difficulties.

Early in July 1900 he sailed from England, and on the 11th he was sworn in as Governor and Commander-in-Chief of the City and Garrison.

CHAPTER XIX.

GIBRALTAR.

1900-1905.

It has been said that the Governorship of Gibraltar was not a heavy charge compared with some that White had held. When he was commanding an Army Corps in Burma, and helping to bring into order a country larger than Great Britain; or when he was in charge of the Army in India, with 300,000 men under his orders, and a series of frontier wars on his hands; or lately, when he was stemming the Boer onset in South Africa, his work and responsibilities had been far greater. For an active and ambitious soldier Gibraltar was apt to be regarded as something like a "shelf."

Nevertheless it was a charge of real importance. As a naval base the great Rock had been for two hundred years invaluable to England, and the secure holding of it had meant much not only to our naval position in the Mediterranean, but to British supremacy in other seas. The military garrison was considerable, as a rule about five thousand men, with a strong

artillery. Moreover, the Governor had to control a civil population four or five times as numerous as his armed force. There was much work connected with the fleet. And the proximity of the Spanish mainland, to which Gibraltar is joined by a strip of territory once probably overflowed but now dry, gave rise to a variety of more or less troublesome questions requiring care and patience to settle. To the Spaniards the possession of Gibraltar by England has always, and naturally, been a very sore point, as may easily be understood by any one who will try to imagine what the feelings of Englishmen would be if Spain held a great fortress and naval base at St Michael's Mount, and if her fleets, the most powerful in the world, issued from it to roam round our coasts and dominate the waters of the Channel and the North Sea. The people of Spain, a proud people, and always reminiscent of their past glories, had not given up the hope that some day the Spanish flag would again float over Gibraltar, and that they would not only see their own territory free from foreign occupation, but be able to use the fortress as a gateway from which they could pass out to the fulfilment of their traditional dream of empire in northern Africa. All this a British Governor of Gibraltar had to understand and keep in mind when dealing with the officials of the Spanish Government. His position therefore was one which called for imagination and tact. Finally, as a great port of call, Gibraltar imposed upon its Governor constant duties of ceremonial and entertainment.

White's reception at Gibraltar was cordial, and gave him much pleasure. It was an earnest of the good feeling shown to him during the next five years by all classes of the community. But he was still unwell, and for a time the heat tried him. He writes to Mrs Baly on the 24th July 1901:—

. . . At first I took rather a gloomy view of my prospect of being able to stand the climate. I felt the Levanter very much. I really could not even write a letter without falling asleep over it, and at night when I ought to have been asleep I was equally wakeful.

The effect of the east wind did not last long, and his letters soon became cheerful enough. When he was in Ireland he had been presented by County Antrim with a fine well-bred charger, which he had called "Welcome"; and now he writes to his brother, whom he was always fond of "chaffing" about the poem which won the Newdigate:—

Just returned from church, in a temperature of over 80°. Not pleasant when buttoned up in a smart uniform blue coat, and tightly strapped heavy blue cloth overalls, &c. The horse "Welcome" has developed a bit of temper here. Short of work, I think. He objects to the "crisp wavelets" on the beach, and "tender curving lines of creamy spray." As the beach is the only riding-ground this is inconvenient, especially as he plunges aside from the break of each wavelet, and has nearly knocked over more than one Carabinero.[1] These gentlemen shoot at very slight provocation. There were two men trying to run a cargo of tobacco shot dead by one of them two days ago. The brother of one of the smugglers

[1] The Carabineros were Spanish frontier guards.

stabbed the Carabinero and killed him—total bag, 4 killed—as I suppose the brother will be executed.

The smuggling of tobacco from Gibraltar into Spain was one of the perpetual grievances to which the British occupation gave rise.

Before the summer was well over, the days grew delicious, "clear, crisp, and at the same time warm." The Spanish scenery within easy reach of Gibraltar is in many parts extremely beautiful, and White soon began to enjoy it thoroughly. It is not, of course, on the grand scale of the Himalayas, and he had neither opportunity nor inclination for his favourite mountain walks, as his "mended leg" was apt to give trouble in warm weather; but he found much to please and interest him. On the 15th September he writes to his brother:—

I don't think I have written to you since this day week, on which day I made an excursion to Ronda. I never had a more beautiful trip. We crossed the Bay of Gibraltar—the Spaniards call it the Bay of Algeciras—in lovely weather, starting at 8.30, landed at Algeciras, and there had a special waiting for us under the direction of a very obliging Scotchman, Mr Morrison, who runs the line and made it for the Spaniards.[1] The country through which it passes from Algeciras to Ronda is lovely. It winds through the cork woods, serpentines through grand mountain gorges, and as it approaches Ronda makes a wide circuit through the Ronda valley, which is a vast garden of fig, vine, olive, apple, and other fruit trees.

At Ronda he saw a bull-fight, the national sport of Spain, and had to admit that "the way the matador

[1] White was afterwards indebted to Mr Morrison for many pleasant tours in the south of Spain.

plays the bull is very exciting," as indeed it is. There can be few sports demanding more skill and courage. "I suppose I was in luck," he writes, "as both matadors were wounded and one I thought was done for." But he finds, as most Englishmen find, that the horses are "a disgusting sight"—forced upon the horns of the bull to be gored, "even with their entrails hanging out." I cannot find that White ever attended another serious bull-fight during the five years he spent at Gibraltar.

On the 30th of September he crosses the Bay to Algeciras, and drives to Tarifa.

> It was a most lovely drive along a perfect road. . . . I only wish I had my old walking powers. I could do some beautiful walks by the help of a steam launch, which I can always command.

Before the end of the year he was introduced to the shooting of Southern Spain, which in its way is very good.

> On the 1st December, after a garden party, got up largely to meet the officers of the fleet, I went across the Bay to Algeciras, and dined and slept with . . . Mr Morrison, a good Scot. . . . I went on next day by train to Jerez, pronounced Herez, where I was met at the railway station by my host Mr Williams and his son, both in the wine business in Jerez. Next day (Monday, 3rd) I stayed at Jerez and visited the Bodega and tasted rare sherries.[1] Next morning (Tuesday)

[1] The Persians have a tradition that the name Jerez is a corruption of Shiraz—the name of the place where their best wine is grown—whence our word Sherry. They say that Phœnician traders in ancient days carried the Shiraz vine to Spain. The two wines are similar in look and character, though the Shiraz perhaps more nearly resembles Madeira.

we went to the shooting ground, called the "Coto," Spanish, I believe, for the preserve. It is a very large tract, 30 miles long by 10 broad, a perfect place for wild-fowl. Clouds of duck, geese, teal, &c. The preserve is also in its higher parts well wooded, with splendid under cover. There are about 1000 red deer, a lot of wild pig, and other smaller game. We shot 2000 duck, about half a dozen stags, and about the same number of wild boars. I shot badly. The weather was cold, and we had to ride 12 miles first morning after our arrival to the duck ground. We got up at 3 and were in the water just at sunrise, and precious cold it was. . . . Other days we had beats for big game. I missed two stags, or rather missed one and wounded another slightly, which got away.

One of the boars went for the dogs, killed one, and cut three others badly. He also cut two horses. Hooper,[1] who had a rusty old Spanish spear, then went in for him into the jungle on foot, and had the nerve and good fortune to get the spear home in the nose of the pig, a part in which he is very sensitive, and the dog owner, a fine wild-looking Spaniard, backed him well, and caught piggy by the hind legs and turned him over. Amongst the game in the Coto I forgot to mention some wild camels, which were imported into Spain to carry loads, but were found not to suit and were many years ago turned out, and their progeny have became wild. All Spain that I have seen is lovely.

In November he was hunting in the cork woods :—

I find . . . that riding as I did yesterday, say 35 miles, including hunting over very blind and heavy hills and dales on big and impetuous horses, takes a lot out of me, but it is better to feel wholesomely tired with exercise than to get liver, and this place is very bad for it. M. Rivière, the French

[1] Captain Hooper of the 5th Lancers was one of White's aides-de-camp. He had made his way a year or so before through the Boer lines into Ladysmith, a difficult and risky feat.

cook, too, conduces to develop the size of the liver, as he provides nothing but the richest foods and sauces. However, he turns out a most creditable table, and that goes a long way.

Lady White had now come out from England, doubtless bringing M. Rivière, and had set to work upon a round of hospitable dinners and dances, and other entertainments, which she was exceptionally capable of carrying through with success. An admirable hostess, who thoroughly enjoyed receiving her guests, and therefore made them enjoy themselves, she was of the greatest help to her husband; and the Governor's house at Gibraltar soon became famous for its open-handed and graceful hospitality. So it remained throughout White's tenure of the post; and he fully approved, for, if he sometimes thought with uneasiness of his heavy expenditure and dwindling Irish rents, he had always, when in a prominent position, regarded it as part of his duty to keep open house.

White had been much pleased a little while before by the invitation of one of his small daughters to Windsor. "It was kind of the dear old Queen to wish to see Georgie," he wrote, with more affection than reverence, though no man had a deeper reverence for his sovereign. Just before the end of the year White was rejoiced to see again his old chief Lord Roberts, now on his way back from South Africa, with Ian Hamilton and other officers. Lord Roberts had a great reception in Gibraltar, as was to be expected, and enjoyed it the more for being White's guest.

It need hardly be said that, since his own return from South Africa, White had watched with the deepest interest the course of the campaign. He was now much concerned at the beginning of a public controversy regarding the messages which had passed between him and Sir Redvers Buller during the siege of Ladysmith. These messages were in no way private, and when asked by Mr Brodrick, who had now become Secretary of State for War, to produce them, White did so; but he had always kept his copy of them under lock and key, and could not understand how the purport of them had become known to the press. Nothing was further from his own wish than to attack Buller on the subject, or in any way to criticise the operations for the relief of his garrison. He had always entertained a high opinion of Buller;[1] and, though he knew that Buller had not approved of some of his proceedings,—though also he had not approved of some of Buller's,—he fully realised the great difficulties under which the relief had been effected. Throughout the most unfortunate controversy which followed, culminating in Buller's famous speech of October 1901, and his removal from the command at Aldershot, White maintained an attitude of strict reserve, and declined to give to the press any copies of papers in his possession, or to write anything himself for publication. He had nothing to

[1] I have quoted some of his references to Buller in a former chapter. Here is another, in a letter to Miss Warrender, of 1897: "He talks wildly, but to my mind he has very strong points. The absence of self-advertisement attracts me to him, and his indifference to popular applause."

fear from the production of all the correspondence, and when the matter had come into public notice he would have been glad, if officially permitted, to use the text of the papers in order to defend himself and Penn Symons against certain criticisms which he considered ignorant and unjust; but he deplored the manner in which he and Buller had been set up in a position of antagonism, and did his utmost to keep out of the whole thing as far as Buller was concerned. Further, he thoroughly disapproved of Buller's removal from the Aldershot command. The controversy is at an end now, and nothing but harm would be done by going into the details of it here. All that I wish to bring out is the fact that it was in no way originated or fomented by White, to whom it was throughout most repugnant.

About this time, early in 1901, he first saw Mahan's book on the war, which he tells his brother was "delightful reading to me." Naturally, when his campaign in Natal was being, as he thought, very unfairly criticised, it was pleasant to find that the famous American, writing for Americans, with a mind free from all prejudice, had formed so high an opinion of his conduct of that campaign. Mahan was no indiscriminate admirer. For example, he thought the occupation of Dundee strategically unsound, an "undeniable error"; so that his approval on the whole case was the more gratifying. Nor was Mahan's book the only pleasant thing that came to White at this time. From the people of South Canterbury in New

Zealand he received a "beautiful little howitzer" as a mark of their esteem for his services; and a little later, on the anniversary of the relief of Ladysmith, arrived a telegram from the Mayor of the town:—

> We send you greetings on this the first anniversary of our relief. We may forget what we suffered, but not what you did for us in keeping the old flag flying.

This was one of many letters and telegrams on the subject received by White.

Meanwhile he had been deeply grieved by the death of the Queen. He writes on the 26th January to his friend Miss Warrender:—

> Thanks for yours of the 21st received to-day. Yes, I feel the death of the good Queen much. She was so good to me when I was in trouble, & so sweet to me when I came home. I am so glad now she sent for me that last night when she told me she did not wish me to go without saying "good-bye" to me.
>
> . . . She has passed away full of years, blessed & reverenced by all. Never in the history of the world has any sovereign earned & received such widespread reverence.
>
> For once in my life I joined in a public tribute, & wrote a few lines "In Memory," which I send to you. . . .

The lines are perhaps the best that White ever wrote, and to show one aspect of his mind and feeling they are reproduced here. He was always a little uncertain about the rhythm of his verses; and his brother, a candid critic, pointed out that the first line of one stanza was difficult to scan; but the lines came

from his heart, and are surely creditable to a man whose business was soldiering, not poetry.

In Memoriam.

I.

Where Calpe's stern-brow'd monolith on high
Rears her arm'd head in proud supremacy,
There—England's minute guns, with deep-toned moan,
Roll forth the requiem of a great soul gone.

II.

Strong fort, whose purpose fit it seems to be
That England's flag should wave from sea to sea,
There now—that honor'd symbol bows its head
In silent reverence of our greatest dead.

III.

Victoria—now but history's noblest page
In the dead century, the Victorian age.
Should we repine? Nay, shall we not rejoice,
That no child century, with feebler voice,

IV.

Should claim a share in Her, that central form,
Our guide in weal, in woe, in calm, in storm
For sixty years, in that great cycle dead
On which her life its fairest lustre shed.

V.

She was but mortal—longer life could be
But pain and sorrow under God's decree:
Better behind the veil to lie alone
Than drift with years from intellect's high throne.

VI.

Glorious reign! prolonged to the utmost hour
That mind can hold its plenitude of power;
Still Thy voice strong to guard Thy people free,
Still Thy firm Arm the prop of liberty.

VII.

Thy people's friend—our greatest and our best,
In tears we leave Thee to Thy well-earned rest,
An age—the record of Thy glorious name,
Thy people's love more cherished cause of fame.

VIII.

He, who in Thine age most fitly bore
The laurel of the poet's tuneful lore,
Condoled the darkest sorrow of Thy life,
The clouded splendour of the lengthened strife

IX.

In lonely sorrow, and he hymned the hope
Thy people's love would help Thee still to cope
With all the mighty matters of Thy reign,
"Till God's love set Thee at his side again."

X.

Thy part well done, brave heart! rest there in peace
Where toil and moil and war and sorrow cease.
Heart of a Queen, in highest purpose free,
Yet Christ-like in its human sympathy.

G.

GIBRALTAR, 23*rd January* 1901.

Not long after these lines were written the memorable voyage of the present King to the overseas dominions was undertaken; and on the 20th March, a beautiful day, the *Ophir* steamed into the Bay of Gibraltar through the ships of the Channel squadron and Mediterranean fleet. The visit lasted two days, and but for the weather, which soon became inclement, was in every way successful. The Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York expressed great pleasure at their reception in this their first landing-place, and it was the beginning of a progress which undoubtedly had a remarkable effect for good throughout the Empire.

White was much troubled at this time by the conviction, which had gradually forced itself upon his mind, that the defences of Gibraltar were inadequate. The development of heavy artillery during recent years, and the extraordinary advance which had taken place in naval gunnery, made him feel that in case of war with a great naval power, or a great military power in alliance with Spain against us, the bombardment of Gibraltar might be a very serious matter. He had learnt at Ladysmith what an unpleasant effect can be brought about by a few heavy guns outranging those of the defence; and the position in Gibraltar was complicated by the exposed situation of the town and harbour, which must always be a grave embarrassment to the fortress. The state of affairs then existing has no doubt been entirely changed; but at the time it involved serious danger, for England was then in "splendid isolation," and a combination of European powers against her was by no means an impossibility.

The condition of Morocco was in these circumstances an important matter, for our interests there seemed to conflict in some measure with those of France, and there was always a risk that this might lead to trouble. The British Minister at Tangier was then Sir Arthur Nicolson,[1] and White soon came into contact with him, the result being a warm friendship which was never interrupted.

[1] Now the Rt. Hon. Sir Arthur Nicolson, Bart., G.C.B., &c., Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

To Miss Warrender White writes of him on the 25th March :—

> Sir A. Nicolson came over, and I am only sorry I had so little leisure to enjoy his society. He is a man after my own heart, so simple and straight.

White's appreciation of the Minister at Tangier was perhaps the more remarkable because he was by no means inclined to look upon diplomatists with favour. In a later letter he writes: "I distrust the report of one diplomatist on another. They have little loyalty of class." But, however this may be, the friendship between the two North of Ireland men became close, and there are many references in White's letters to pleasant visits exchanged between them while he remained in Gibraltar.

The place itself, too, was beginning to "grow upon him," as he had been told it would do. His letters now contain many passages showing this. For example, on Sunday, the 20th October, he writes to Miss Warrender :—

> I have had a delightful day. It was one of Southern Spain's very best, & instead of going to Church I put on walking dress & wandered alone all over the top of the Rock, fanned by cooling zephyrs homed in Andalusia & steeped in a Southern Sun. I lay about in pockets of the Mons Calpe & looked over Gibraltar Bay at the Spanish Mainland & over the Mediterranean to Morocco & Ceuta, all as clearly cut as a most transparent air could make them. Jackie enjoyed it immensely & so did his Master. . . .

"Jackie" was a favourite dachshund. White was

always a lover of animals, and the little dog was his constant companion.

Throughout the year 1902 the controversy about the war in South Africa went on increasing in bitterness, and caused White much vexation. He resented both the tendency shown in many quarters to decry the British officer in general, and the virulent terms in which particular men were attacked by their critics. White had long experience of war, and felt—what most civilians also feel who have seen anything of the British officer on service—that he knows his business quite as well as the British professional man of other classes, and is as a rule a brave and capable leader in the field. Mahan, so often quoted before, has a curiously worded but striking passage upon this point. Comparing the fighting qualities of British and Boers he touches upon "the numerous artful traps into which British detachments were led, like game into the snare of the hunter," and at the same time upon the sure failure of the hunter to achieve success in war.

> The hunter, meeting superior strength with superior cunning, without even the very least willingness to lose his life in order to carry his end, may be brave even to recklessness; but he rejects habitually the tone of mind distinctive of the soldier, who counts life naught if only by its sacrifice the end may be attained, or honour preserved. In so far, that element of stupidity which has been somewhat lavishly attributed to the British officers' too single-minded attention to their end, to the exclusion of care for their own persons and those of their men, has a military value not only great but decisive. The quality needs direction and control, certainly; but, having been re-

proached for now two centuries, the question is apt—Where has it placed Great Britain among the nations of the earth?

As to the kindred question of the attacks on particular men, White writes about Buller and the well-known telegram suggesting the possibility of the surrender of Ladysmith :—

The judgment on him is scandalous in its abuse, and the version of the telegram is grossly exaggerated.

About the same time occurred an incident which shows White's general attitude in this matter. As colonel of the Gordon Highlanders he was going in the course of the summer to attend a regimental ceremony at Aberdeen. He now received information that the town intended to present him with a sword of honour on the occasion. He immediately telegraphed: "While deeply touched and sincerely grateful to those who would present me with a claymore, I earnestly beg to be excused," and he followed up the telegram by a letter explaining that he was "especially anxious," for reasons given, "to avoid any personal connection with occasions that might bring up again the Ladysmith despatches." He was troubled by the thought that those who wished to do him honour might be hurt by this refusal; but, in spite of more than one appeal for a reconsideration, he steadily adhered to it. He knew that such a presentation must mean that he would be brought again into something like a position of antagonism to Buller, and he wrote to his brother: "It is higher form to keep myself" from anything of the kind, "and I even believe it

is the wiser policy." In another letter he writes: "I consider nothing would be worse than parading the country receiving honours now."

In the course of the year White was considerably exercised in mind by labour troubles in Gibraltar. He had to deal then with a standing population of about 5000 Spanish, or Spanish-speaking, workmen, and a daily immigration of something like 10,000 more, so that strikes and discontent among them were a rather serious matter. In case of war there might even have been an element of danger in the situation. But by dint of much patience he was able to keep this large body of ignorant and excitable men in order, and to the end of his tenure of the Governorship a recurrence of the difficulty was avoided. This was perhaps due in some measure to White's sympathetic insight into the Spanish feeling about Gibraltar. He writes to his brother on the 18th May:—

> This great upstanding Rock is aggressively in evidence from every height in the adjoining Spanish territory, even far inland, and the Spaniards cannot help regarding it as an insult and a shame.

White knew that the place was so important to the Empire that there could be no question of giving it up; but this did not prevent his seeing the matter from the Spanish point of view, and doing his best to avoid as far as possible anything that could hurt Spanish susceptibilities.

Englishmen in general do not understand, naturally enough, how strongly Spaniards feel on the subject.

Accustomed to regard Gibraltar as an integral part of the British dominions, they are apt to be surprised at the idea that the matter concerns Spain at all. But Spaniards have long memories. I was at this time British Ambassador in Madrid, and nothing struck me more forcibly during my stay there than the importance attached by Spaniards to the British occupation of the fortress. Among the ignorant country folk, and indeed among some who were not ignorant country folk, there was a belief that England coveted a large slice of Spanish territory, apparently to secure the fortress from danger on the land side; and the belief was so strong that the sound of British naval guns at target practice was apt to result in excited reports to the Spanish Foreign Office of an imminent British landing. It seems hardly credible, but it was the case.

In August 1902, after the festivities connected with the coronation of King Edward, White took leave to England, and carried out his visit to Aberdeen, where he opened the Gordon Highlanders' Memorial Institute in honour of officers and men who had fallen in the South African war. He took the opportunity to speak, as he frequently did on such occasions, upon the subject of temperance, which he regarded as a matter of the greatest possible importance for the army, "the first and the greatest essential." He also visited Manchester, having had under his orders in South Africa both the Liverpool and Manchester Regiments. He had stipulated that his reception might be as unostentatious as possible. But the

popular enthusiasm would not be repressed, and he was somewhat disconcerted at finding himself surrounded by cheering crowds. However, he was able to avoid any embarrassing incidents, and the visit passed off successfully.

I notice among his letters written during this period of his life two passages which throw some light upon his attitude towards religion. He had never been what is generally called a religious man; that is to say, that he was reserved in the declaration of his views, and not conspicuous for his attention to religious forms. But he was none the less earnest in his thoughts upon such matters. In one letter he writes to his brother:—

> I believe in religion as the most important element in the formation of national character. The Mauser would have lacked half its force if it had not been backed by the neurotic force of the Dutch Bible behind it.

It need hardly be said that a man so essentially courteous, and full of consideration for the feelings of other men, always behaved with scrupulous respect toward faiths differing from his own. The Roman Catholic clergy in Gibraltar, for instance, found him everything they could wish, and were on the most friendly terms with him. But his own faith seems to have been rather a form of Deism than orthodox Christianity. He writes on one occasion to the Rev. Charles Voysey:—

> All the evidences around us prove irrefutably the creation of a God working on a system and under fixed laws that sway

this world and those around us in an ordered unity of marvellous magnitude, yet infinitely small in the minutiæ of its perfect machinery; but these same evidences seem to me equally to disestablish the miraculous interferences with those laws which are presented to us as revelations from the past but which have no counterpart in the present.

Towards the end of this summer, 1902, a Royal Commission was appointed under the presidency of Lord Elgin to consider and report upon certain matters connected with the war, and White was warned that he would probably be called upon to give evidence. Accordingly in February 1903 he attended before the Commission and was examined at considerable length. His evidence is recorded in the Blue-Book afterwards issued, and there is nothing in it which requires special notice here; but it is pleasant to be able to quote the following letter, written to a friend by a member of the Commission, which shows how his attitude impressed his hearers:—

Yesterday your friend Sir George White was examined before our Commission. He, once more, by his reserve and perfect straightforwardness, proved himself the great gentleman which he undoubtedly is: and furthermore, he made a most excellent case for his actions from the commencement to the end of his Natal campaign. He did not say one angry or vindictive word of any one, in spite of the many unkind things which have been said and written about his strategy and tactics. He left on the Commission a profound feeling of gratitude, that our nation can produce men of his sort.

It may be added that the production before the Commission of all the correspondence hitherto withheld

from publication did much to prevent for the future the repetition of unfounded criticisms, and to establish White's title to the gratitude not only of the Commission, but of the country. Of course there remained, and must always remain, room for differences of opinion upon some features of the campaign. But the same might be said of any campaign that ever was fought.

In the course of 1903 I see that White and I were in correspondence with regard to two points which illustrate the delicacy of the relations between the British Governor of Gibraltar and the neighbouring Spanish authorities. In the first case a small hut had been erected, within the line of British sentries on the isthmus between Gibraltar and the mainland, for the manufacture of tar macadam required for roads. This was remarked by the Spaniards, and objections were raised to the construction of "military works" on the isthmus. In the second case a report reached White to the effect that a race-stand was to be put up on the "neutral ground" between the line of British sentries and the Spanish customs fence. He at once warned me that if an attempt were made to carry this out he would strongly protest. Both points, if I remember right, were settled without difficulty; but they were examples of the questions which were constantly arising and sometimes leading to friction.

This year saw White raised to the highest rank a soldier can attain. In April King Edward paid a memorable visit to Gibraltar, the first ever paid by an English King. His Majesty was received with great

enthusiasm, and remained some days, during which he held a review of the garrison. But the most gratifying incident of the King's visit, to White personally, was His Majesty's announcement at a banquet on the 8th April that he was about to appoint White to the rank of Field-Marshal. The announcement was followed by the words: "Nobody has deserved it better, and there has been no more loyal soldier to his sovereign and his country."

After making this announcement the King turned to Lady White and said, "I do hope that Sir George will now desist from risking his life in point-to-point races." White had ridden in the garrison point-to-point a couple of days earlier.

The announcement of his promotion brought White a large number of congratulations, among others one from the Gordon Highlanders, and one from Sir Evelyn Wood, despatched when he had thought that White's promotion meant his own supersession. To the former White replied:—

> I am especially pleased to receive the good wishes of my old comrades of the Gordon Highlanders, as they appeal to me as a voice from the home in which I spent the best years of my life. My military career has been built up on the sure foundation of the courage and honour of the Gordon Highlanders, and the tartan with the yellow stripe in it will ever be to me the most cherished uniform in the British Army.

The visit of the King elicited from White another poem. It was much praised by some, but his brother told him that it was "a fine bold attempt on what

I should pronounce an impossible subject." It does not seem to be worth reproducing here.

A month or two later White was in England, where he had gone to receive his Field-Marshal's baton from the King, and the degree of D.C.L. and LL.D. from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge respectively. He was already LL.D. of Edinburgh and Dublin. At both of the English universities his reception was enthusiastic. Cambridge was conferring the degree at the same time upon a very distinguished body of men —the Duke of Connaught, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Grenfell, Admiral Sir Edward Seymour, Sir Ernest Satow, Sir John French, Sir Archibald Hunter, and Captain Percy Scott. Yet, according to the report in the 'Standard,' "Sir George White was undoubtedly the hero of the occasion." The undergraduates greeted him with a storm of cheering and shouts of "Ladysmith," again and again renewed, so that the public orator had to wait some minutes before he could begin his remarks. At Oxford it was much the same thing; and there could be no doubt, even to White himself, that at all events among the undergraduates of the two universities he was one of the most popular men in the country. It pleased him, but it surprised him, and did him no harm.

After a short visit to his home in Ireland during the summer, White returned to his post; and at the beginning of the next year, 1904, which was to be an interesting year for him, he was writing from Gibraltar on various questions connected with the security of the fortress and harbour.

Meanwhile there had been a week of manœuvres, during which the garrison had to defend Gibraltar against attacks by a British fleet under the command of Lord Charles Beresford, so that the guns were going day and night.

I like working with Charlie B. [White wrote to his brother]. He is, at all events to outward appearances, always considerate and appreciative of the land defence.

The letter has a postscript :—

In the manœuvres the R.A. carelessly fired a drill shell 100 lbs. weight which fell close to the Vice-Admiral's flagship, the *Cæsar*. Admiral signalled "Wish you would make your defence less realistic." I replied, "Regret much, but motto of defence is *Aut Cæsar aut nullus*."

The two were evidently enjoying themselves.

The manœuvres were apparently not incompatible with a day's hunting, in which some of the sailors joined, for the same letter records that "we had 55 minutes yesterday in a pour of rain with the hounds." "Charlie B." had the family love of a horse, and often attended the garrison meets.

A few days later the German Emperor paid a visit to Gibraltar, which White describes in a letter to his brother of the 21st March :—

The Kaiser cleared out of harbour before 12 o'clock last night amidst bouquets of rockets, searchlights playing on the old Rock, and Charlie Beresford's fleet illuminated. The last always appeals to me as the very prettiest way of making night lend itself to glorify a celebrity.

I arranged a programme for him by wire to Berlin and Vigo,

and when he declared his intention of being in on Friday instead of Saturday I asked him to be in at 11 o'clock that day.[1] He acted up to this exactly, and I boarded the *König-Albert* very shortly after she had anchored. He was very gracious, greeted me as "the defender of Ladysmith," whose photograph he knew. I had arranged to give him rather a state reception, for which he appeared to be quite prepared, & asked "What dress?" I said, "If your Majesty would honour us by wearing the dress of a British Field-Marshal I am sure my garrison would count it a very great compliment." He said, "Certainly I will."

I received him with a Royal Salute as he put foot on land, had a fine guard of honour for him, & a cortege. I seated myself alongside of H.M., with two of his staff, high officers, opposite to him. He wore the ribbon of the Garter & a beautiful star worked in diamonds specially ordered for him by the Queen (Victoria), but not ready until after her death, so presented to him by Edward VII. The day was a beautiful one. I lined the whole British territory, from our frontier adjoining Spain on the north to Europa point on the south, with soldiers & sailors of the Fleet, & made a very imposing spectacle. . . .

Sunday, 27th.—As we drove round the side of the Rock where it is traversed by roads the view was a lovely one, & H.M. & his staff officers frequently broke into enthusiastic gutturals. There was no great feeling displayed by the people either in the town of Gibraltar or along the route outside it. They were quiet & respectful but not enthusiastic. I could not get them to decorate their houses much. As the Emperor's carriage turned round from the most northern point of British territory here H.M. was saluted from the Galleries. The Rock is on its northern face quite perpendicular, & the embrasures of the Galleries are on this face. As the Germans were looking at its 1400 ft. of sheer precipice a flash as from the Rock itself, followed at a considerable interval by the report & the

[1] The 18th March.



The Kaiser with Sir George White at Gibraltar.

curling up of a little cloud of sun-lined smoke, proclaimed that the salute from the Galleries had commenced. The effect was good. The Emperor noticed everything & asked about everything. I brought him back to the Convent to luncheon, & entertained a lot of his suite, 25 I think. Amy received H.M. in the hall with perfect manners, & he took to her at once. The luncheon was a good one, & the Teutons punished it. During lunch I had arranged that the Emperor's servants and those of the suite should have rooms allotted to each officer and their plain clothes laid out. They changed at a wonderful pace, and I had the Emperor driven up to the Galleries, thro' which he walked I rode myself. I had provided a thoroughly quiet pony for H.M. to ride up to the top of the Rock, but his staff seemed nervous about his riding a strange horse, and he seemed to prefer walking, so I walked with him. It is a steep climb, but I led him slowly, & he got to the top apparently without undue effort & said he was delighted to get the exercise after having been cooped up on board ship. The view from the top is very good, gives both the Mediterranean & the Bay & Straits of Gibraltar. The Emperor was much struck by it, and said it was a representation on a small scale of the insularity & inaccessibility of England itself. (N.B.—Gib. is not an island, but is joined on to the Continent of Europe by a narrow neck of very low land over which the sea must have once been.) He walked down again, talking very freely all the way, enjoying the sight of some of his fatter & heavier staff officers labouring after him, & chaffing them with rough German humour. While we were descending, and still at a considerable height above the sea, the sunset gun fired, and the flags should have gone down altogether on the warships in harbour (the Channel Fleet). They had all been dressed with flags rainbow fashion to celebrate the Emperor's coming. On one of the ships these masses of flags got foul of some of the stays and gave trouble. The Emperor was delighted, and said he longed to give vent to his indignation in flowing bunting, referring to naval signalling messages. I thought it would have been more

king-like, or at all events foreign king-like, not to have taken such notice of a small accident which a puff of wind may at any time cause. It was, however, German. That night I, Lord Charles Beresford, Sir W. Acland, Admiral Hedworth Lambton, & some of the others dined with him. When at lunch he asked all the ladies of my party & Miss Violet Brooke, a niece of Hastings Brooke, who was staying with us.

The dinner was an elaborate one in the German style, & good. . . . The party was bright & pleasant, & the Emperor talked away as if enjoying it.

On Saturday I handed him over to the resident Vice-Admiral, Sir W. Acland, who showed him round the dockyard in course of construction, in which he took great interest, & with the details of which he is thoroughly conversant. He found the Prussian Army fairly perfect, but the German Navy is his particular child, & he studies it, & knows all about it & its docks, armament, engines, etc.

On Saturday evening he dined with us at the Convent. He took Amy in first, & though he ate very little, he was very complimentary to the cook & the table. The latter was very good. Before dinner I had explained to him all I expected him to do, & he declared himself my most obedient subject for the time. We had the ball-room furnished as a drawing-room, & a reception after dinner. There was a daïs on which I had intended him to sit, but he said, "How can I sit when so many ladies are standing?" I told him how I intended to proceed, & brought up ladies & gentlemen in rapid succession & presented them to him, generally giving him a cue to open conversation. He played up splendidly & with very ready humour, had something appropriate to say to everybody. My difficulty was to get the presentees away, & made many enemies in doing so.

The Emperor was delighted, compared the stiffness and constraint at some of the places he had lately visited to our plan, and said he would certainly adopt it at his own Court.

At luncheon he had presented his portrait, and Amy tried

to make out it was for her, but it evidently was for me, as he gave A. his picture and a bracelet next day. He is very fond of children, and Georgie came in for the best thing he gave, viz., a very pretty little brooch in diamonds and rubies, with the imperial crown, and W under it. . . .

On Sunday he lunched with Hedworth Lambton, 2nd in command of the Channel Fleet, & very graciously came to tea at the Convent to say "good-bye" to Amy. They got on splendidly together.

The Emperor dined on Sunday night with Lord Chas. Beresford. We had a very cheery dinner, at which Charlie B. exceeded himself. . . . Charlie B. sent him off in a shower of rockets fired in bouquets & with all his searchlights turned on to the grim old Rock, which looked very weird. . . .

He talked very frankly & freely. We had no speeches at toast-drinking by his special wish. He is violently anti-Japanese in the present struggle,[1] and is evidently not pleased at our *rapprochement* to France. He spoke of our "New friends, the French." . . .

I quite forgot to say that H.M. planted a tree in our garden. It was a little silver fir, brought from Whitehall by Georgie. The Emperor had a long talk to our Scotch gardener, and sent him, the butler and coachman, handsome scarf-pins as presents.

In another letter, an incomplete copy of which I find among White's letters to his brother, in his brother's handwriting, White writes of the Emperor :—

He is not complimentary about our army, but acknowledges that our officers are good sportsmen, "though not professional soldiers." He says they go into the army for sport, and they lead their troops in the same spirit of good sportsmen, and die like gentlemen, at their head.

[1] The war between Japan and Russia was then going on.

But White seems to have forgiven the criticism, for he gives some further details regarding the Emperor's readiness and gracious behaviour, and sums up with the words, "He has been extraordinarily nice."

On the 26th May White writes to his brother:—

Last Saturday I went with Amy for a week's end change to Ronda, to stay in a little cottage with Mr & Mrs Moseley.[1] . . . It was the time of the Ronda fair, and I went on Saturday afternoon to a ladies' bull-fight, in which the performers were women. There were no horses in the performance, so the most offensive feature of the ordinary bull-fight was avoided. The bulls were young ones, but some of them showed sport, & the ladies appeared to me skilful. One lady was knocked over by a bull, but she escaped being gored, & got up unhurt.

Ronda is in itself very beautiful; but Saturday, Sunday, & Monday were very hot days. On our return to Gib. on Monday evening I found Sir Thomas Lipton had been to call upon me, having come in his yacht *Erin*. The Empress Eugenie was on board, & her equerry called also. Amy, I, Jack, May, & Gladys dined on board the *Erin* on Tuesday evening, & we were all very much fascinated by H.M. . . . She . . . talks English fluently & fearlessly, and has the perfection of manners. . . .

As a soldier White had followed with deep interest the course of the Russo-Japanese war, and towards the end of the year his interest became something more personal, for early in November, in consequence of the "North Sea incident," when the Russian fleet fired by mistake on some British fishing boats, it seemed as if we might at any moment be involved in

[1] White's son afterwards married Miss Moseley.

hostilities ourselves. After the incident the Russian fleet, or part of it, came into Vigo, and then into Tangier, and there was much excitement in Gibraltar, where a large number of British ships were gathered, under the command of Lord Charles Beresford. White had received no orders on the subject from the War Office; but he was responsible for the safety of his fortress, and in consultation with the naval commander, he made preparations for all eventualities. The fact that the Russians had mining ships with them made it just possible that there might be trouble in case of a conflict occurring, though naturally the two Irishmen were confident, and in no way disinclined for a brush with any enemy. "I must say Charlie Beresford is a very pleasant fellow to work with," White wrote, "he is always so active and so gay." But if they hoped for a chance of fighting, they were disappointed. The British Government very wisely kept the angry nation out of war, and the Russian fleet sailed away unmolested to its brave but hopeless fight at Tsushima.

White's term of command at Gibraltar was now drawing to a close. Indeed, he had been suddenly informed during the previous month that it was already at an end, as it was held by the War Office to have begun before he sailed for South Africa in 1899. Against this unexpected decision he vigorously protested, urging that his time in Natal ought not to be counted against him, and eventually the War Office accepted his view. Nevertheless he had only a few months more to serve, and in the cir-

cumstances he had sent in his name for the Governorship of Chelsea Hospital, which had become vacant by the death of Field-Marshal Sir Henry Norman. On the 25th of November he received a letter from Mr Arnold Foster offering him the appointment, which he accepted. He did not feel overjoyed at the prospect. "As a personal question," he writes to his brother, "I do not look forward to a winter residence in the slums of Chelsea"; and a little later: "Personally, I hate the idea of London for the years left to me, and would rather have a hut in the Himalayas." But he was not a rich man, and he felt that a comfortable house and an extra £500 a year were not to be thrown away.

As a matter of fact he was not called upon to take up the post at once, and this was a relief, for he had now got really attached to Gibraltar. His relations with the Navy had throughout been most cordial, and he had become extremely popular with every one on the Rock. Only his own exertions prevented the inhabitants from sending to the Colonial Office a petition against his transfer. The climate, too, and the "delightful picnics in the cork woods," and the still more delightful hunting, had done him much good. "I shall never be as well as I have been here," he wrote. And as the days went on he became more and more reluctant to go.

Yet, in spite of the shadow of departure hanging over him, his new year opened pleasantly enough. He received from the German Emperor very cordial cards and good wishes, which pleased him; and he

was, in spite of the King's warning of two years before, looking forward, with the keenness of a boy, to a last attempt at winning the garrison "Point-to-point." He tells his brother on the 25th January that he has got "Welcome" very fit, and that, though riding 15 stone, he hopes to finish in a creditable place. The hope was doomed to disappointment, for shortly before the race "Welcome" fell with a Spanish groom and broke his knees. "I could have cried," White says. He enters his second hunter, "but he is not in it with 'Welcome' for speed, and all I can hope for is a good gallop." He got his gallop, which he describes in a letter of the 5th February :—

Our great event here has been the point-to-point race. We had a galloping course about 3½ miles; a bright, sunshiny day and ground in capital condition. There were about 80 starters, & Jack, on an old racehorse called Licurgo, came in first. He rode most dashingly & full split down a very steep hill on a pair of forelegs that looked like suicide on the plain. He gets his name on the point-to-point cup, and he wins outright a special cup given by the M.F.H. for the first in over 13 stone. I believe he meant it for me, but Jack won it, and I was second of that weight. If Larios (M.F.H.)[1] had made it over 14 stone, I would have won it. I believe I rode over 15 stone, & Warlock carried me well, but he is not fast. Poor old horse has had a leg ever since.

This was the last race in which White rode, and as he was now nearly seventy years of age, it must be allowed that he had kept up his love of hard riding longer than most men do.

[1] The Larios brothers were a well-known family who did much for Gibraltar, notably for the hunting and polo.

In the midst of his riding White was at this time much interested in a matter which is hardly among those one would have expected a soldier to study, the question of Tariff Reform. He had read all he could about it, and given it real attention. The matter is mentioned here only as an illustration of what had always been one of White's characteristics, an inclination to take an interest in questions outside his own sphere of duty, and to form independent opinions upon them. His conclusion upon this particular question is stated in a letter to his brother:—

> I have long thought that Chamberlain had not really studied his subject when he entered on his Tariff campaign.

The opinion is doubtless of no great weight; but it is an instance of White's independence of judgment, for his sympathies, in so far as he had any on political questions, were with the Unionist party.

In the course of the next month visits were paid to Gibraltar by the Duke and Duchess of Connaught, Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, and the German Emperor, who wished to see the place again. The Duke of Connaught remained two or three days in Gibraltar inspecting the fortress and garrison, and, as usual, "really worked hard"; but White had seen the Duke in India, and was in no way surprised at the minute care with which he went into all details. Ten days later the Queen arrived in the royal yacht, and was received by the inhabitants of the Rock with great enthusiasm. Regarding Her Majesty's visit, White writes to his brother:—

The Queen won all hearts by her most gracious manner and the good-humoured way in which she took the pelting with flowers. We had a state dinner (full dress) on board the *Victoria & Albert*. No ladies. . . . The Atlantic Fleet here was illuminated, which is always a beautiful sight. . . . On Wednesday the Queen landed about 11 o'clock, and made an expedition through the galleries. The day was very hot. We had fantastic trappings on the donkeys, and the Queen, who showed great pluck, rode right through, about 2 hours, in a very hot sun. . . . On Thursday she landed at 11.30, & I took her driving & riding a donkey to the top of the Rock. This she enjoyed immensely. . . . The Signal-master lives on the top of the Rock, & the Queen went into his house & talked to his wife, & said she wished she would change places with her for a few days. The site is a magnificent one, & the day was perfect.

On the 31st March the Emperor's ship came into the harbour.

The Emperor frightened us by sending, the day we expected him, and had a dinner of 40 and an evening party of 200, a wireless message which arrived mutilated but evidently contemplated his not arriving until next day in case he was detained at Tangier. I wired saying we had made all preparations for him and expected him. He turned up all right, and received me alone in his part of the deck of the huge North German Lloyds the *Hamburg*, and was most cordial and friendly—said he had hardly dared to hope he would find us here still, and was much pleased. He did not land till dinner-time, when he drove up to the Convent, where I had Guards of Honour for him. We dined in Mess Dress, as he had asked me not to have much state, and we had a reception for him afterwards . . . and it must have been after one when he asked for the carriage.

Next day he landed at 11, & took a drive with me. I

took him to a new Military Hospital just finished here, & which is in very good order, which he inspected minutely & with his usual intelligence. We had a very bright day & a very bright drive. He asked if he might smoke, & then for a match, & abused my Staff because they had no matches. I informed him that the British Staff prided themselves on being *Matchless*. He capped me on several occasions, but I think I *had* him once. As we arrived at Europa Point, I pointed out Ceuta, on the Moorish coast opposite Gib, but held by Spain. He turned to me and laughingly said, "When will England annex that?" I replied: "When it may suit her (Ceuta), sir."

We lunched with him on board the *Hamburg*, and his very numerous suite and guests—a most excellent lunch but long drawn out. . . . I tried to get away two or three times, but he would not hear of it, saying he was a Senior Field Marshal to me, and kept talking to Amy till long after 4 o'clock, the hour they were timed to sail. He was, as usual, very outspoken, dwelt on the misrepresentations made by our press, said he had done his very best at Kiel to give our King the best reception possible, but that our press were still describing him as England's enemy. In the evening I got the wireless message of which the following is a copy:—

"GOVERNOR & LADY WHITE.

"Once more sincerest thanks for all kindness shown to me & my friends, which made our stay delightful & ever to be remembered. Good-bye & God bless you all. WILLIAM I.R.

"*FRIEDRICH CARL.*"

Friedrich Carl was the cruiser escorting the *Hamburg*, & was, of course, fitted with appliances for sending wireless messages. I forgot to say that he gave me a first-rate likeness of himself in a bronze statuette, and also a large picture of the Colours of all the regiments in his army.

Soon after the German Emperor's departure White received a proof of the chapter on the siege of Ladysmith in the official History of the South African War, and was pleased to find that from his point of view it gave a correct account of the siege. But, he said, it came too late. No one would read it now.

Early in May he was over in England, at work upon questions connected with military contracts in South Africa, and upon the important differences of opinion which had arisen between Lord Curzon and Lord Kitchener on the subject of Indian military administration. As regards the second of these matters, White had, when Commander-in-Chief in India, regarded the Military Department of the Government of India with little favour; but after full consideration of the arguments on both sides, he saw reason somewhat to modify his views, and to recognise that there was much to be said for Lord Curzon's. It is unnecessary to discuss the matter here.

Returning to his post before the end of the month, White had an opportunity of delivering on the 24th of May, Empire Day, what was practically, though not formally, his farewell speech to the people of Gibraltar. He had long been uneasy, and more than uneasy, at our unpreparedness for war, which seemed to him the result of a want of patriotic education and understanding among the people of Great Britain. It was this theme that he took for his speech, and perhaps his words may not unfitly

be quoted here. They were spoken at a general muster and parade of the schools of Gibraltar, and were as follows :—

When I had the honour of addressing you last year, I made the British Empire the text of my speech. I hope now, however, that the particulars of that Empire have, in the months that have elapsed, become better known, especially to the younger and more impressionable members of our community. The details of that Empire are so wonderful and so stirring that the man or woman who can hear of them or read of them without a thrill must be dead in soul. The great fact that it covers one-fifth of the face of the earth, and contains one-fourth of the population of the world, is in itself sufficient to evoke an enthusiasm of loyalty and devotion to it in every one who has had the privilege to be born into the fold, and has the right to look up with a sense of ownership and responsibility, however small, to the support of the flag of England.

Some months ago I read the report of a speech delivered by that fine speaker and good friend of England, Mr Choate, the Ambassador of the United States in London. The speech was delivered at one of our educational institutions, and Mr Choate warned us that our system of education in one important—perhaps the most important—branch of national education lagged far behind that which obtains in the United States—namely, education in patriotism.

I agree with Mr Choate that this is a notable blot in our curriculum, and one fraught with dangerous potentialities in this fighting world of ours. When I had read his speech, I made a mental note that if ever it should be my privilege to again address a meeting on the birthday of our great Queen Victoria, of glorious memory, I would make "patriotism" my theme.

To follow up Mr Choate's valuable suggestion. If there is a country in the world where the population possess them-

selves, in peace and security, of the blessings which God has showered on their favoured land, it is the United States of America. Their long seaboard is safeguarded from invasion by the two greatest oceans of the universe, the Pacific and the Atlantic. Their population is some 80 millions, and is rapidly increasing; and their wealth—and mark well, wealth means the Sinews of War—is unequalled, and is still in its earlier stages. But, notwithstanding these great natural advantages, their far-seeing Statesmen, headed by their practical President, neglect no opportunity of educating the children of the nation in patriotism. The children of all classes are taught military exercises and marching, and great pains is taken to bring them up to honour the National Flag of America.

The great, and in many quarters unexpected, successes of Japan have directed special attention to the method of education in that wonderful country; and I happen, now many years ago, to have been very much impressed by the evidence even then brought forward of their close attention to education in devotion to their country. I was Commander-in-Chief in India about the time of the war that Japan carried on so successfully against China. One day, at my headquarters, a Japanese colonel was ushered in to me. He asked permission to study our system of pack transport for hill campaigns. I gave him passes to our best depôts in India. After he had got what he wanted, I got into conversation with him, and spoke of instances I had heard of patriotism and devotion on the part of the women in Japan. I had just read of one Japanese lady—a bride—whose husband had been killed in the earliest days of the war. On hearing of her loss, she dressed herself in her bridal costume and went to her husband's people and asked for congratulations on having had a husband who was amongst the first to give his life for the Mikado and his country. She then went to her own people, and gloried in the sacrifice that she had given to her country. Then her personal grief overcame her, and she committed

suicide. Although she gave the interests of her country precedence over her private grief, yet she was so heart-broken that she sought the refuge that many of her country-people do in misfortune or even in imagined disgrace.

I repeated this story to the Japanese colonel, and asked him if he believed it. He said "Yes, it is often done so." I then asked him how he accounted for the Japanese putting the interests of the State before the most sacred of personal affections and sentiments. He replied: "We teach it in our elementary schools." I was inclined to laugh at what appeared to me so simple a means of arriving at so far-reaching and so world-compelling an end. Any one, however, who has followed the history of the war will have seen how gloriously their system of education has worked out to the salvation of their country.

When Admiral Togo, the Nelson of Japan, returned to Tokio after the wonderful services he had rendered to his country, he refused all celebrations for himself, as he said his work was not yet done. But with the system of education in patriotism strong in my mind, I read that there were thousands of school children at the station to greet him, and I read into that simple statement a high state purpose and the greatest principle of national education that, perhaps, the world has ever seen, and that has made these people what they are to-day—invincible.

I will give you some more examples of their great patriotism. Last week, when I was in England, I met an old war comrade of my own, in whose word I have implicit trust. He was War Correspondent of Kuroki's army, and gave me the following truly marvellous statistics of the most celebrated brigade in that army—Okasaki's brigade. They sailed from their island home 4000 fighting men. So tough was the material of which this brigade was composed that, after 7·72 months of most severe campaigning, they had only lost 4 men of disease; but there were only 3 of the rank and file left out of the original 4000. All the rest had

been killed, or so wounded that they had to be sent back to Japan. They had borne the brunt of 13 decisive battles and still claimed the front, and the losses they have borne have raised a monument to their honour and to their national system of education unsurpassed in the history of the world, and will secure to them for all time the adoration of their countrymen.

But, I would ask my hearers, if these people require such careful education in the sterner duties of patriotism who are but now emerging into our idea of civilisation, how much more necessary is it for us, the civilised of ages, to keep *our* civilisation virile? I often ask myself the question, Is the highest civilisation compatible with the highest fighting efficiency? And if I were to answer from the experience of nations that have gone before, I would answer "No." Greece, in the zenith of her power, combined all that was grandest in art and in letters with the invincibility of her phalanx. But luxury and the self-indulgence of individualism followed fast in the tracks of her greater refinement, sapping the manhood of the State, with the baneful result that history tells us of. Rome, too—Imperial Rome! the mistress of the world—fell from that high state from the same causes, and in her decline she but shared the same fate as her great predecessors in the world's history—Carthage, Macedonia, Persia, Egypt, and many others. But we are the schooled of ages, and forewarned is forearmed. Let us, while imitating the virtues and the manliness of their civilisation, avoid its luxury and emasculating tendencies. Already, in my own short career, I detect the insidious approach of weakness masquerading in the garb of higher humanity, which, though the most beautiful ideal, is too utopian and too visionary for this fighting and grasping world of ours, in which wars are as constant as of old, and more bloody than ever. Let us beware of drifting into a philanthrophy too diffused to be patriotic, and too weak and watery to hold its own against the aggression of our

times. We have the highest authority for taking as our working precept: "When the strong man armed keepeth his house, his goods are in safety."

Ladies and gentleman, and more especially you who are teachers at home or in more extended spheres, remember that the greatest end of national education is the building up of the national character, and that its highest asset is patriotism. If what I have said to-day—and this is the last time I can have the privilege of addressing you—falls upon loyal hearts that will give them effect in their own homes or in wider circles, I shall not have spoken in vain.

These are not mere words, but the statement of a practical truth which has surely been too long ignored or derided. No one who has lived for any length of time in the United States of America can have failed to be impressed by the effect of "education in patriotism" upon the spirit of the American people. If Great Britain had had the advantage of such an education in the past the war which she is now waging might never have come upon her, or, coming upon her, would have found her in many ways better prepared to face it.

On the 13th of June White laid down the Governorship of Gibraltar, and sailed for England. "We had a tremendous send-off," he writes to his brother. "All the schools and even the hounds at the Governor's landing to see us off." It was in reality an impressive farewell gathering, and the expressions of regret from every section of the community were as sincere as they were warm. Never had a Governor and his family been more popular.

So ended White's time of foreign service. It had

begun fifty years before, when he sailed for India as a young subaltern in the Inniskillings. Now he was a Field-Marshal, his breast covered with war medals and Grand Crosses; and, what was even more, a man regarded throughout the Empire as a typical English gentleman, whose honour was as spotless as his courage.

CHAPTER XX.

GOVERNOR OF CHELSEA HOSPITAL.

A FEW days after White's arrival in England he was informed that the King had been pleased to confer upon him the Order of Merit. He took up his new post, therefore, with the satisfaction of knowing that he was among the small number of Englishmen regarded as pre-eminent in their various callings. Among English soldiers Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener were the only two who had been selected for this honour. In writing to his brother White laughingly called it the "Old Man's Order," but he was none the less conscious of its value.

The duties of White's charge as Governor of the Royal Hospital at Chelsea were not heavy. He had to supervise the management of something over five hundred old and disabled soldiers who were in-pensioners, and wore the familiar red coat of the Hospital. He had also some work connected with the many thousands of out-pensioners who did not reside in the Hospital — that is to say, of all the men who became eligible for a pension on leaving the army. A Board met weekly at the Hospital, under the presidency of the Paymaster-General, to

settle their claims, and there was much correspondence connected with these pensions. But in the two Lieutenant-Governors who held the post during White's term—Sir Ronald Lane and Sir Charles Crutchley—he found very capable administrators, as well as good friends; and his Civil Secretary, Mr Tatham Hughes, was an excellent official. Neither part of the charge, therefore, entailed severe or continuous duty, so that he had much spare time at his disposal, which he was able to devote to other objects. Some of it was taken up by the study of various important matters upon which a man of his experience was naturally consulted; for example, the controversy already mentioned on military administration in India. Nevertheless his time was largely his own, and during the last seven years of his life he found scope for his activities outside the range of his official work rather than within it.

From this point of view his interests were many; but there was one which specially appealed to him. As years went on he was more and more troubled by the possibility of war in Europe; and he now set to work upon the apparently hopeless task of awakening the country to the danger of its position. In this task the most insistent and powerful worker was his old Chief, Lord Roberts, and White's work was secondary; but he did all he could. His papers show that he gave to the matter the most careful and unceasing study. Among the mass of newspaper extracts which he kept, the majority are on this subject; and the last of all is a reprint, by the

'Daily Mail' in 1910, of Admiral Mahan's article on "Britain and the German Navy." In the meantime White delivered in various parts of the kingdom many speeches directly or indirectly bearing upon the question. They did not, unfortunately, convince the British public. When the warnings of Lord Roberts passed unheeded, it was not likely that White would have greater success. And perhaps his speeches were the less effective in their results because he put forward no definite scheme of action. Though a prominent member of the National Service League, he did not entirely agree with the specific proposals of the League; but in all probability he did not like to bring forward any scheme of his own which might conflict with them. In any case his various drafts and copies of speeches, always rather fragmentary and carelessly kept, do not show any precise alternative scheme of national organisation for war. But on one point he was quite clear: that a fleet alone was insufficient for our needs, and that in case of our being drawn into a great European war we must, to win, be able to throw into the scale a great army. As examples of his views it may be well to quote the following extracts from speeches which, though the drafts bear no date, were apparently, from their place in the book where he kept them, delivered in 1905:—

I have been asked to speak to you to-night on the Defence of our Country, and as I hold that the system we rely upon for that most vital of all purposes is altogether inadequate to the calls that may at any time be made upon it, I consider

it a sacred duty to say plainly and fully the views I have formed on the subject, without extenuation or exaggeration, and to give, as far as possible, some of the reasons and evidences upon which I have arrived at those opinions.

The essence of all modern organisation for war in all European nations except ourselves is "Preparedness." We alone—relying, as I think, too much on our insular position—stand apart from what in other countries is considered the first duty of loyal citizenship — viz., to make some sacrifice to the State to which we owe service and allegiance.

The present seems not to be an inopportune time to press the importance of "Preparedness." It is only a few days since, out of a clear sky, a little cloud no bigger than a man's hand threatens the very existence of the treaty upon which the stability of the peace of Europe rests.[1] Although that cloud has risen over a remote and petty segment of the political horizon, great interests may become involved, and England, on the great principle of *noblesse oblige*, cannot, without loss of prestige, stand apart, but is looked to to take a prominent place in the settlement. When treaties are torn up, or attempted to be torn up, and flung in the face of the framers, affairs are approaching the final arbitration of force. Have we the force to support the position and the duty that devolve upon us? This is the question for the solution of which the National Defence League has been formed.

This question has given rise to two or more separate lines of thought or argument.

The first school hold that war is, under all its aspects, inexcusable in a nation of our advanced civilisation, and that therefore all preparations for it make those that partake in them accomplices in that great crime. It requires but little depth of thought to show the fallacy that underlies these theories. War cannot be considered by itself in the abstract.

[1] He was referring apparently to affairs in Morocco.

It is an effect and not a cause. It is the effect of such human passions as self-interest, ambition, jealousy, and pride; and while these passions last their incidence will result in wars. It has been so since the days when Cain, through jealousy, made war on Abel and slew him; and it has continued to be so up to the present day. Can we flatter ourselves to-day that the play of these passions is so much a thing of the past that we can afford to neglect them in the preparation of safeguarding our country in the future? What would be thought of a man of business who failed to make some provision to meet eventualities that have constantly recurred from the days of Adam up to the present time, but took his stand on the faith that they would never recur again?

In short, all history teaches us that war, relentless war, is a principle of the universe, and that though the ideal of universal peace is beautiful, it is the dream of a visionary, while war is the experience of men. . . .

Besides, there can be no surer way of leading up to war than the neglect of the strongest of all deterrents—the fear of defeat. War is a balancing of risks against results. The probability of war is in proportion to the smallness of the risks and the greatness of the prizes. If we apply this evident truth to ourselves we will realise our great need for superior force. We have voluntarily taken upon ourselves the responsibility of defending the lives, the interests, and the freedom of 400,000,000 of souls who live under the shadow of the flag of England. Think of it. One-fourth of the human race. And we occupy in nearly as large a proportion the choicest parts of the earth. Other nations are expanding more rapidly than we are. The population of Germany is increasing at the rate of 1,000,000 a year, while our rate of increase is but 300,000.

Must not this soon, according to the inexorable decree of nature, lead to that struggle for existence which amongst nations as amongst men follows the line of least resistance,

and works out the survival of the fittest or, in other words, the strongest?

I do not for one minute ignore the advantages of our insular position and the arguments of those that say: "As an insular power we must have a predominant navy to defend our shores and to cover England's great highway of the sea, upon which we are dependent for our food supplies, but having made provision for it, we require a very small army, and that chiefly to furnish garrisons for our great foreign possessions. An army organised thus, in such a large proportion for service in the uttermost parts of the earth, must be a volunteer army and must be highly paid."

It is evident that those who hold these opinions rely, in case of sudden war, almost entirely on our Navy alone.

Now I have the greatest belief in our Navy, and I am confident that what men and ships can do our Navy will accomplish. I am bound to them by ties of gratitude as well as of admiration, as it was due to the promptitude, skill, and zeal of naval officers that I had guns with which to answer the 6-inch guns of the Boers at Ladysmith. But there still remains the question that forces itself forward for consideration before a problem of such vital importance as the safety of our Empire can be safely and exhaustively settled. *Can a nation, even an island power, waye successful war and maintain its position amongst the nations* with the aid of a fleet alone? I have studied this question by the light that history throws upon it, and by the power of realising and forecasting events which experience lends, and I am forced to the conclusion that the fish of the sea cannot press home on and conquer the dogs of the land.

It will, I think, be granted by the cultivated audience in this hall that no nation that stands on the high moral and altruistic platform that England justly claims should go to war without a fair prospect of conquering peace. That is, that her aim in making the final appeal to arms, after all other and gentler means have failed, must be to force terms

upon her enemy that are compatible with the honour and to a fair degree with the interests of England. Now it is in this that Naval power, unless adequately supported by land forces, fails.

The great apostle of Naval power, Admiral A. T. Mahan, has said: "It must be received as a military axiom that war, however defensive in moral character, must be waged aggressively if it is to hope for success." And again: "In the matter of the preparation for war one clear idea should be absorbed first by every one who, recognising that war is still a possibility, desires to see his country ready. This idea is that, however defensive in origin or political character a war may be, the assumption of a simple defensive in war is ruin. War once declared must be waged offensively, aggressively. The enemy must not be fended off, he must be smitten down."

Another great military writer and thinker, the late Colonel Henderson, says: "Treaties of peace are only signed within sight of an enemy's capital." "A high-spirited people will seldom be brought to the point of making terms unless its army is annihilated in the heart of its own country."

In the history of England we have many examples of Naval victories, but there is one, and the greatest of all, that lends itself as an example of the principle that a martial people cannot be compelled to peace by a naval victory no matter how decisive. After the great victory of Trafalgar there was no fleet in Europe that could show against the British. That victory was all-important, as it deprived Napoleon of his last hope of invading England. He had collected an army of 150,000 men at Boulogne for the express purpose of invading England. When he there got the news of Trafalgar he gave up for ever the hope of landing an army in England, but it in no way forced him to make terms with his enemies. Far from it. It appeared actually to whet his appetite for war. Trafalgar was fought on the 21st October 1805, but there was no peace practically till ten years later, and it was then

gained by the effects of successive land victories culminating at Waterloo. As I have said, Trafalgar was fought on the 21st October 1805, and before the end of that year Napoleon had counter-marched his Boulogne army and had fought and won the great battle of Austerlitz, in which he defeated the combined armies of Austria and Russia and annexed territory sufficient to create two kingdoms, over which he appointed kings to rule in the interests of France.

In thus turning his back on the west coast of France, which was most exposed to the Naval strength of England, he absolutely ignored England's power of offensive action, or of exercising any effect upon the balance of power or on the destinies of Europe.

In the following year, entirely uncontrolled by our paramount navy, he marched on Berlin, occupied it, and even had the audacity to declare the British Isles in a state of blockade, although he had not a ship left that could engage a British squadron. And, more remarkable still, he all but succeeded, through the compelling power that paramount military force enabled him to exercise over other powers. He could not have accomplished this—nay, he dare not have attempted it—if England had had a military force of any consideration in a state of preparedness to strike a blow on land with the aid of that ally, Prussia, with whom ten years later—ten years of unprecedented loss and unparalleled expenditure throughout Europe—England won the great victory, a land victory mark! of Waterloo.

In March 1805, according to a statement made by a leading statesman, England's total military force, including the Indian forces, was about 390,000 men. The population of England then was 15,000,000. But, in addition, there were 30,000 Sea Fencibles and 380,000 Volunteers, so that the total number of men under arms was about 800,000, or about 1 in 4 of the men capable of bearing arms.

In 1905 the effectives were less by some 50,000 than a hundred years before in the United Kingdom. But in the

hundred years that had elapsed the area of the Empire had increased tenfold and the population sixteenfold.

But our present armed force is still more insufficient if we compare it with the colossal expansion of the Continental powers. The armed strength of France is now seven times greater than it was in 1805, of Russia about eight times greater, of Austria about seven times greater, and the armed forces of Germany are some ten times greater than those of Prussia in 1805.

White then speaks of our commerce, and the arrangements necessary for its protection. He goes on:—

But to realise the weight of these risks at the present time, and the awful responsibility that would rest on our Navy, the following considerations must be weighed.

In the beginning of the last century the population of the United Kingdom was from 15 to 17 millions. Home-produced wheat was about 14,000,000 quarters. Foreign wheat imported about 900,000 quarters. In 1905 the mouths to be fed were over 43 millions. The home-produced wheat had fallen to 9 million quarters. The bread-stuffs consumed may be taken as above 35,000,000 quarters, and consequently we now require some 26 to 27 millions of quarters from abroad to feed our people. The Navy therefore becomes responsible for feeding three-fourths of our population.

In the interest of the Navy, therefore, and to enable them to fulfil the awful responsibility that devolves upon them, it is of absolutely vital importance that the manhood reared on the land should be armed, trained, and equipped to hurl back the wave of invasion if any foreign power should attempt to pollute the integrity of our birthright.

In this connection, thank God, we have had no recent experience even of the threat of invasion. But it is by putting ourselves, as far as possible, into the presence of

events as they may turn out that we alone can take reasonable precautions for even probable eventualities. Napoleon did not think the invasion of England an impossible operation. Another power is advancing to the standard of Naval efficiency that might make that risk draw near to our coasts. History tells us of the exertions made in England in 1805 to meet such a threat, and I have already given you a relative statement of the armed forces of England then and now. . . .

The armies of the Continent are now from 7 to 10 times larger than they were then, and they are prepared to the last gaiter-button. The essence of modern military organisation is preparedness. The early strokes of a modern campaign are delivered with such rapidity and in such overwhelming strength that it leaves no time for the development of latent resources. The purpose of the campaign is effected, and the numbers who if ready might have averted a disaster, would be powerless to reverse it even if their numbers were doubled.

There is, I think, another great danger in being dependent on a Navy alone to fend off danger from our coasts. The aggressive action of a fleet is not only not decisive, as I have shown in the case of Trafalgar, but it is fraught with complications with other powers. After Trafalgar we had not only a superiority of naval power in Europe, but a monopoly. We can never hope for such monopoly again. Think of the fleets of America, France, Germany, Italy, and Japan. How long can we carry on a war with no definite means of ending it without embroiling ourselves with other powers? Modern naval war, with its blockades, its torpedoes, and its submarine mines, is a most invidious operation, depriving other nations of their wonted trading ports, and even involving great dangers outside the zone of actual fighting. We have relied much on our insular position. We are no longer, however, alone as an insular power. The position of Japan is very similar in Asia to the one we hold in Europe. She was not content to organise a fleet alone, and to keep it sailing round the island that forms the heart of her empire. Fully realising

the fatal effect of a passive defence, she organised and disciplined to an extraordinary standard of patriotism an Army probably over 1,000,000 strong—and with it as her chief weapon, though splendidly backed by her navy, she wrung terms from her proud rival which have not only secured her independence, but have given her a high place of honour and of influence amongst the nations of the earth.

If she had neglected her army and trusted to her fleet in the proportion that we rely upon ours, it is no unreasonable estimate to say that Russia would now have possession of the toe and heel of Korea, and be threatening the very vitals of her national organisation; and that sun that now shines with such glorious light in the Eastern hemisphere would not be as now the Risen Sun, but the Setting Sun.

Another speech on the same subject delivered about the same time:—

I consider the insufficiency of our land forces a standing danger to England and to her Empire.

Our fleet is grand and is proportionate to the position that England justly arrogates to herself in the world. I have lately returned from the Command of Gibraltar, where I have had the privilege of associating with England's first line of defence, the Navy, and I can congratulate the country on the zeal, ability, and efficiency of its *personnel*. I can also say that its establishment in fighting ships would enable it to cope with the fleets of any two powers, and long may it be kept up to this standard of pre-eminence. In fact the British Empire is well represented by her Navy.

But where shall we look for her Army on the roster of the armed nations of Europe, classed numerically? Perhaps the Netherlands and Monaco may save us from the very bottom rung of the ladder. I know that there are those who will ask, "With the Navy that we have what do we require an Army for?" I think the answer is, We require an Army

to safeguard one-quarter of the earth, which we possess, and one-quarter of the population of the world, which looks to us for altruistic government and championship against wrong; and it is in the righteous fulfilment of these two duties alone that we can find justification for our wide domain. Can the Navy alone secure the performance of this sacred duty? I yield to none in my admiration of our splendid Navy, and what sailors and ships can do they will do. But let us appeal to history as to whether this is sufficient. Ask the Loyalists of Natal and the Transvaal whether our battleships could have hauled down the Vier-Kleur and given them the advantages of the impartial justice that obtains under the Union Jack; and yet perhaps nobody can gauge more accurately than I can how nearly the Union Jack was being the one to come down, from inadequacy of means at the opening of the campaign. Go back a few years more with me. Could our ships have been sailed through the sands of the Bayuda desert to write that loudly-called-for chapter in our history that Kitchener wrote at Khartoum, and that ended the blood-stained rule of the Mahdi and restored the wounded prestige of England?

Nothing but a land force could have quelled the Indian Mutiny, or relieved Lucknow, or retaken Delhi. Moreover, there would never have been an Indian Mutiny had not the inadequacy of the British force invited it. The same principle applies to the Crimean War, and to the fall of Sebastopol.

The history of these very days teaches us that Japan, the island kingdom of Asia, as the British Isles are of Europe, requires an Army to repel aggression. Would her Navy, even victorious as it has been, have been able alone to guarantee the integrity of her islands from the insidious advance of the great Northern military power? No. The political problem, which was based on Korea and Manchuria, has been solved by an Army of 500,000 men.

As compared to the British Empire, Japan is self-contained. Yet with the statesmanship that is not afraid to look the

future in the face, and to provide against its dangers while there is yet time, she has not been content to guard the shores of her islands alone; but having anticipated the danger of the time to come, she has been enabled to hurl it back by timely preparation, by resolute action, and by patriotic sacrifice—the stitch in time that saves nine.

Even if we grant the contention that the coasts of England are inviolable, that is not enough. England is but a little dot on the map on which we fix one point of the compass while we sweep the other proudly round to the poles to mark the truer limits of British responsibility. She is but the heart of a vast organism whose giant lines reach to the uttermost parts of the earth. But that heart has learnt to circulate the life-blood of England through all those limbs, and who can say that it would not shrivel or even cease to beat if called on for a meaner pulsation? The nation that aspires to world-wide Empire, and yet shrinks from the self-sacrifice that the defence of that Empire may at any time call for, is not only foolish, it is contemptible. Yet as we wax hot in faction we wax cold in preparedness for war. We excite ourselves over the political game of hide-and-seek on Westminster Bridge, and we view with cold indifference the War Game on Salisbury Plain. Immunity has made us mad. We prefer the self-indulgence of chancing it to the sacrifice necessary to prepare against it. The luxury of individuals has always preceded the downfall of nations. To fight the battles of the State should be the highest ambition of its manhood—

> For Romans in Rome's quarrel
> Spared neither land nor gold,
> Nor son, nor wife, nor limb, nor life,
> In the brave days of old.

The foregoing speeches may seem now to be superfluous matter. The nation, under the teaching of war, has passed far beyond the point when such arguments were needed. But it must be remembered

that they were put forward ten years ago, when the bulk of the nation refused to believe that there was any danger; and in considering the services which George White rendered to his country it is surely not superfluous to show that he warned England, long before the time came, what her necessities would some day be.

In the course of this year, 1905, White went up to Scotland to receive the freedom of the city of Edinburgh, and also paid visits to North Wales and Ireland, and to Liverpool, where he unveiled a memorial to the officers and men of the Liverpool Regiment who had fallen in Afghanistan, Burmah, and South Africa. Wherever he went, he spoke upon the subject of our unpreparedness for war, or kindred matters.

The following are extracts from his letters and speeches during the following year:—

To John White.

ROYAL HOSPITAL, CHELSEA,
New Year's Day, 1906.

Showers of New Year's & Xmas cards fall upon us. Amongst others three from the German Emperor. One addressed in his own handwriting to "Lady White," with a photographic group of himself & all his staff & guests on board the *Homburg*, and written below: "A group of the Voyagers in the *Homburg*, who will never forget how they were spoiled at Gibraltar by Sir George and Lady White."

(2) A picture card of Gibraltar.

(3) Addressed to me, a photograph of himself mounted, surrounded by his staff, at a March-past, presumably in Germany. It came through the German ambassador, & I

have written through H.E. asking him to convey our most sincere thanks for gracious remembrance, & wishing H.M. to be crowned with every blessing & a long & beneficent reign. I thought 'beneficent' barred a war against England and France. . . .

To Miss Sellar.

CHELSEA, *6th January* 06.

I think Mr Haldane has started very well. The speech he has already committed himself to appealed to me as a well of water in a thirsty land. He did not degrade his arguments by the vulgarity, trickery, & abuse which has disgusted me in the political speeches of both sides—even of those who are leaders. They appear to me pitched so very low down, and to be arguments addressed to the lowest instincts & intelligences. Haldane spoke like a statesman who had a patriotic cause to serve. I don't know him.

I was a strong Chamberlainite in my sympathies & theories, & still am, but my closer reading into the machinery of carrying out Tariff reform, under the conditions of our Imperial population with its varied interests, & our restricted home production of the necessities of life, has made me afraid of the working of the machinery in what, I believe, would be its very contentious details. In fact, I now believe that tariff reform would be a bone of contention and not a bond of unity. . . .

We are settled here now, the house is furnished & comfortable, but nothing will make me like living in London. . . .

To Miss Sellar.

ROYAL HOSPITAL, CHELSEA,
26th May 1906.

I don't wonder at your astonishment to find me amongst the speakers at the Milner banquet, but your astonishment was nothing to mine when I was asked by Lord Donough-

more, the Secretary, to do it, & still more when I saw the company, so many of whom ought to have been called upon to propose Joe's health before me. But I could not refuse.

> " Not though the soldier knew
> Some one had blundered.
> Mine not to reason why,
> Mine but to do and die."

All I could do I did,—made it as short as possible. I did not read the report in the 'Times.' I hate what I have said when I read it. I thought Curzon was far the best. He can speak!

To John White.

CHELSEA, 26*th May* 1906.

I was, as you know, very brief, and I think relieved the anxiety of some anxious friends who, considering the company I was put forward to speak in, felt for me. It is rather hard lines to have to follow Curzon twice in a few days. I thought him very fine & quite the speech of the evening. I was really out of my class, & ought not to have been called upon to speak. . . . Am being positively pestered to go about the country on the stump. Four to-day.

To John White.

CHELSEA, 4*th Nov.* 1906.

I think it will interest you to hear that I have received the following telegram this evening:—

To Field-Marshal Sir George White, Chelsea Hospital, London.—Just seen by the papers news of your daughter May's wedding. So sorry not to have been informed earlier, as I would have sent representative. God's blessing & my very best wishes. My present will be transmitted by German Embassy. WILLIAM I.R.

How nice of him.

Yours,

G.

White's daughter had married Captain Currie, of the Artillery, who had been one of her father's aides-de-camp at Gibraltar.

The Royal Regiment had also supplied White with his military secretary, Colonel Fairholme, lately British Attaché in Belgium, of whom he thought very highly.

Speech on 22nd November 1906, at Bridgewater House Church Army.

I have been asked to take the chair here this afternoon, and in support of such a cause I could not possibly say "No"; but in the interests of that cause I wish I had more confidence in your chairman. However, my engagement to come here this afternoon has had this great advantage to me personally: it has made me see a little ,and read a great deal of the grand work the Church Army is doing to decrease the awful blot that extreme poverty and its twin-sister crime have stamped on the face of our boasted civilisation,—our two-sided civilisation, with its head of gold and its feet of clay; its head sparkling with gems, worth a king's ransom, its feet caked with the poached filth that floods the middle street. I have realised to an extent that never came home to me before that if it is true, as Burns tells us, that "man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn," it is equally true, and a far more pleasing prospect to contemplate, that man's humanity to man may dry the tears in many eyes, and man's whole-hearted sympathy with his fellow-man, even towards the most degraded form that God's image may assume, is the product of our advanced education in Christianity, and the phase of our modern social evolution that pleads most appealingly to our instincts, and is therefore most worthy of our supporting efforts.

In the little Church Army pamphlet that I hold in my hand, and which is entitled, I fear all too justly, 'The Lowest Rung,' I find the following lines quoted from the works of our great philosopher poet Tennyson:—

> "I hold it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

These lines may be accepted as the argument of the Church Army's efforts. They are full of matter, and are beautiful in their appositeness to the cause we have met together to-day to support. They throw the light of hope where hope had been nearly merged into the darkness of despair. But to install and maintain that light no visionary dreams will suffice. It calls for work, real and tangible work. . . .

> "Men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things."

Yes! But it is for us to provide the stepping-stones. Surely a golden stair! for it provides a way of escape for those who hang on the lowest rung immediately above the pit of destruction. There are some 2000 persons who can find no shelter in London by night, and whose best endeavours are given to hide themselves away in out-of-the-way corners to escape the attention of the police. The casual wards are full. The prisons throughout the country provide shelter for tens of thousands. What are the prevailing causes? Poverty, grinding poverty—poverty, it may be, directly traceable to the vices of the pauper, but no less poverty that means starvation, or the next thing to it, to all dependent on them. The next most prevalent cause I believe to be "evil associations."

It would be good for us to think out what would become of us in like conditions and in the same class of society, and be guided in our benefactions by the answer that our inner consciences would give.

I belong to another Army, the more thinking members of which would be proud to claim comradeship with the splendid soldiers of the Church who are fighting the battles of civilisation and humanity with such self-sacrifice, and who are helping so many old soldiers who, from their own faults or untoward events, have fallen upon evil days.

In our endeavours in the Army we can eliminate the fruitful cause of extreme poverty, and our efforts have to be principally directed towards decreasing the habit of drunkenness.

I have often been faced by the argument: Oh! it's all very easy for an officer to keep from drunkenness, but look at the lot we live amongst.

I know the force of this argument, and I believe that in our class, both as regards drunkenness and other crimes, we do not make sufficient allowance for association and surroundings.

I do not for one moment mean to compare the offences with which we have to deal in our Army with the continuous warfare which the officers of the Church Army have to wage against the powers of evil; but I do say, and say emphatically: Provide the means of raising the fallen from the crime-compelling power of dire poverty, and furnish them the means of separating themselves from the evil associations amongst which they breathe in crime, and amidst which to try and earn an honest livelihood would be to court and to get social ostracism, and you will find these ill-growing and stubborn weeds of humanity gradually developing into fairer growths. The Church Army claim that, given the means of carrying out their system in its entirety, they have learnt of experience that they can genuinely reform fifty per cent of their patients. If you think the results satisfactory — and who can do otherwise?—contribute as you can to the means.

Speech to Hon. Artillery Company, Tuesday, 11th December 1906.

It is a great pleasure to me to be associated with the H.A.C. even in distributing the prizes which have been won in contests during the last year.

The reports of your practices are very satisfactory, and have brought you out where your great prestige has led your many friends to expect to find you—namely, at the top of the troops with which you are classed, or very near it.

I know there are men—a class I may say at once that I distrust—who make the worst of everything; pessimists, who say that the only true test of the gunner or the rifleman is when he lays his gun or aims his rifle accurately and steadily when he is at the business end of an enemy's shells; but I can sincerely say that my experience enables me to heap precedent on precedent showing that the corps that use the greatest endeavour and have the highest records in peace put forth the same endeavours in war to maintain their proud pre-eminence.

I remember an incident in action that will exemplify my meaning. I was watching a battery advancing at a trot when a 100 lb. shell burst almost under the very bellies of the horses, raising a cloud of dust and smoke that hid the team and gun from view. It appeared to me that the gun had been wiped out; but, after a second or two, I saw the team emerge, but the horses had in their fright broken into a gallop. I heard the officer's order given in indignant tones, "Trot, will you!" as if the trifling incident of the burst of a 100 lb. shell should not disturb the even tenor of the way of a crack field battery. That discipline was learnt on parade and applied on the field of battle.

I think it is from the German that we have translated the pregnant saying that "The practice of the parade-ground becomes the instinct of the battlefield."

I congratulate you on the "most excellent" standard of signalling to which you have attained. I attach much importance to this part of your training. It is especially valuable in hill campaigning where the eye can range from hill-top to hill-top and command the valleys between, whereas it would, from the topography of the country, take hours to pass orders or give information by word of mouth.

I have sometimes, however, found training in this branch shown in unexpected quarters. I remember once, in a hill campaign against one of the wild and warlike tribes on the frontier in India, asking the officer commanding a battery to concentrate his fire on what appeared to me a hard nut to crack—a position straight in my line of advance. After the first shot, one of the enemy, a Pathan, jumped on a rock behind which he had been sheltered and waved his cummerband wildly. I thought it was a mere sign of defiance, but I observed unusual amusement amongst the men. When I inquired I was informed by the officer commanding the section that the Pathan was chaffing him, and had signalled that his shot was too high and to the right. . . .

Your records are so unique and so grand that, as an old officer who is convinced that our land forces are in no way adequate to support the position that England justly claims amongst the nations of the earth, and the preservation of the balance of power in Europe, I could wish that your members were expressed in thousands and tens of thousands instead of hundreds.

In the course of this year 1906, White received the freedom of the City of London, and his papers show that he also attended many dinners in the city, amongst others those of the Grocers' Company and the Company of Cloth-workers, of which he was an Honorary Liveryman. He found these dinners interesting, and appreciated not only the compliment they involved

but the fact that the wealth and patriotism of the city were of great importance with regard to the question in which he was primarily interested—that of our military power.

White had meanwhile been approached by more than one publisher on the subject of his reminiscences, which he was pressed to write. He never did so, partly because he had never kept a consecutive record of his life, a fact which he regretted when it was too late, and partly from a dislike to appearing in print. "I hate what I have said when I read it," applied not only to his speeches. He had the natural shrinking of all shy men from the publication of his views, and was apt at first sight to think that what had seemed to him good when he was writing it seemed worthless when read. Consequently he did not often write. For example, he was asked during this year to contribute some remarks to a magazine regarding "The qualities that make for success in the Army." His answer was, "I have to thank you for paying me the compliment . . . but I will ask you to excuse me as I scarcely ever write for publication."

In the spring of 1907 White unveiled in one of the corridors of Chelsea Hospital a tablet to the memory of his predecessor, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Norman. Being then in England I was invited to attend, and then saw White again for the first time after several years. I was struck by the change in his appearance. His tall figure was as erect and soldierly as ever, and his voice strong, but he looked worn and aged.

The two men, Norman and White, had served just

fifty years before in the Indian Mutiny, but while White had been chafing at the inglorious though useful work of the Inniskillings in the Punjab, Norman had been in the storm centre, and had greatly distinguished himself at the siege of Delhi. Afterwards he had held many important posts, military and civil, and, as I have said before, had even been offered the Viceroyalty of India. White now gave an account of Norman's long services to the State, and closed with the following words:—

We are very grateful to those to whom we are indebted for placing in our historic cloisters this memorial of a brave soldier, an accomplished statesman, and, above all and before all, of a Christian gentleman who, in every relation of life, brought home to those who had the privilege of his friendship or his love that

> "Manners are not idle, but the fruit
> Of noble nature and of loyal mind."

We leave this record to his memory in the fitting company of those of his two honoured predecessors, Patrick Grant and Donald Stewart; and we may safely challenge the annals of the empire to produce memories of three more chivalrous soldiers, truer patriots, or more single-minded gentlemen."

A few days later White was speaking to a company of cadets. He said among other things:—

These physical exercises have been planned to give you the fullest possible use of your limbs and muscles, and to give every cadet a manly and creditable bearing, and full enjoyment of what every young man who is a credit to his country should rejoice in, namely, his strength and activity. Health, strength,

and activity are great adjuncts to happiness, and contribute much to success in life. The difference in drilling, later in life, those who have had the advantage of this physical training and those who have not had it, has become most marked. In this connection I remember a case in point a long time ago. I was commanding a battalion and recruiting was slack. We were not getting the smart, young, and active lads a commanding officer likes to see joining his regiment at an age when they can be made into smart men and efficient soldiers. In going round I was struck by the awkwardness of one squad. Their limbs and muscles seemed set, and moved more like the branches of an old oak tree than with the freedom of a supple man. The sergeant who was drilling them was a hard man of the old school, and when I said to him, "Sergeant, there are recruits in this squad that don't look very young," he sprang to attention, saluted, cast a glance of scorn from right to left of the squad, and replied, "Sir, there are men in that squad that never was young." Now the training that you have voluntarily entered upon here will save you from ever being spoken of in that way. On the contrary, if you carry on the habit of exercise suitable to your age as it advances, I believe it will give you the enjoyment of activity into a green old age.

Nor is this training of the body merely of advantage in a physical sense; it answers also a high moral purpose. The young man who takes a pleasure and a pride in keeping himself "fit" has laid up a great incentive to a high moral standard. The young man who delights in physical exercises will not indulge in endless smoking, nor allow himself to be drawn into bad company that devote the hours that ought to be allotted to rest of healthily tired muscles to sitting up drinking, gambling, or other bad habits. . . .

This, my lads, is the true ideal of standing shoulder to shoulder in the ranks. You cease to live alone for self in devotion to and love and honour of your company, your corps, and your country. This is the militarism that a certain class who set up as teachers of the people decry; but militarism

means military efficiency, and without military efficiency no nation can be lastingly great and good and true. Unless a nation has military efficiency at its back it has, when challenged, to truckle and compromise. . . .

Those that decry military efficiency are the same as those who belittle the flag to which every English lad ought to be led to look up to with veneration and to serve at any self-sacrifice. The youth of other nations are taught to worship their national symbols, and we alone, whose flag flies in every port in the world, are ungrateful and short-sighted enough to ignore it in the education of our children.

During this year 1907 White spent some weeks abroad, at San Moritz, and took up again his old habit of mountain walks. He found he could still do fairly well, and his letters to his brother give accounts of many long expeditions. "But," he writes, "my best leg was foremost when the 2 came before the 7, and not after it."

At this time the reform of the House of Lords was one of the questions which occupied the mind of the public, and White was much interested in it. The following remark on the subject is taken from a letter to his brother:—

The Lords' Committee to reform themselves reminds me of a sentence passed on an unpopular officer years ago in the 52nd Regiment: "The prisoner is sentenced to be tossed in a blanket, and furthermore to undergo the indignity of bringing his own blanket."

I notice among these letters another remark, which illustrates White's dislike of London society. Discussing with his brother their arrangements for the

summer and autumn, he says he cannot be sure of getting away from Chelsea for the whole of August, "and I would rather be there *in August* than during the season." The family feeling was even stronger in his brother, who detested going out, and could never be induced to spend a night away from his own house, except at Whitehall. There the two brothers met in the latter part of August, and enjoyed themselves, taking long walks together and shooting clay pigeons to get their hand in for the partridges and pheasants. George White had now taken keenly to English shooting, and his diaries during the next few years are full of entries about it. He was still evidently a respectable shot, and fully equal to any walking required.

In October of this year, after his return to London, I find him speaking again on his old subject, the need for a larger army.

COPY OF SPEECH DELIVERED AT THE STAR AND GARTER, RICHMOND, ON THE 9TH OCTOBER 1907, AT THE DISTRIBUTION OF PRIZES TO THE HAM AND PETERSHAM RIFLE CLUB.

. . . I have had considerable experience of our grand Navy, and I can speak of them not only with sincere admiration, but with the deepest gratitude for assistance rendered to me in several campaigns. What men and ships can do you may be confident our Navy will accomplish. But, ladies and gentlemen, a fleet has this important limitation. It may fight, and I believe it will conquer on the sea, but it cannot bring a war against a martial enemy to a decisive conclusion. Now the only object with which a

country of England's advanced civilisation would go to war would be to conquer peace,—that is, to force the enemy to make peace on terms compatible with the wellbeing and the honour of England. . . . Our history, which is so full of naval victories, shows clearly that no matter how decisive they may be at sea, they have never reduced our enemies to that state of helplessness that has forced them to sue for peace. The so-called "Invincible Armada" was defeated in 1588, but there was no peace with Spain for many years afterwards. The battle of Trafalgar is a very convincing example of this. Never was there a more decisive naval victory. Nelson, in a letter found in a blotter after his death addressed to Lady Hamilton, had expressed a hope that he might be enabled to gain a decisive victory, and added the expectation that such a victory would lead to a lasting peace. His most sanguine hopes as regards the naval victory were more than fulfilled. The navies of France and Spain were annihilated, and ceased to exist as such. England was left with a monopoly of sea power and sailed the seas unopposed. But the great sailor, too partial to and too great a believer in sea power, was absolutely wrong in his forecast that even such a naval victory as Trafalgar, unparalleled as its effects were on sea power, could bring such pressure to bear on a martial country like France as to compel her to make peace on terms that would have been acceptable to England. . . .

If we study the effect of the battle of Trafalgar, we find that it deprived Napoleon of all hope of invading England with the army he had collected at Boulogne for that purpose, but its results towards compelling Napoleon to make peace were absolutely nil. It follows that Nelson with his great experience and political acumen had overestimated the compelling power of a naval victory. Where Nelson had attributed too much to sea power, any modern admiral's appraisement must be heavily discounted.

The battle of Trafalgar was fought and won in October

1805. Two months later Napoleon fought and won the battle of Austerlitz, having turned his back on the British naval power, which had no rival on the seas, but was without the power to strike a blow at France even during his absence. Mark now the difference. The Austrians defeated in the land battle of Austerlitz, fought in Moravia, were forced to consent to the terms of the Treaty of Presburg, by which Austria ceded immense territories, out of which Napoleon constituted two kingdoms. This treaty was signed by the contracting powers twenty-three days after the battle of Austerlitz, so rapidly did the dismemberment of Austria follow on her defeat. In 1806 Napoleon fought the battle of Jena, which gave him possession of Berlin, from which place, with a cynical disregard of England's sea power, he issued the famous Berlin Decree interdicting commerce with England, and declaring the British Islands to be in a state of blockade. Again in 1812, Napoleon, ignoring England's sea power, collected the remains of France's manhood and marched to Moscow. It was the vaulting ambition of Napoleon that led him to undertake the disastrous campaign of 1812 in Russia, coupled with the entrance of the Allies into Paris and the victories of Wellington over the French in Spain, culminating with Wellington's entry into France, that led to the abdication of Napoleon in 1814 and peace. . . .

Not long afterwards White was invited to a State banquet at Windsor in honour of the German Emperor and Empress, who were then on a visit to England. The Emperor was as usual friendly and cordial, speaking in the warmest way about his reception at Gibraltar two years before. This was, I think, the last occasion on which White met him, and it is only fair to say that White always spoke of His Majesty with real respect and liking.

The possession of almost unbounded power, which so few men can stand, had not then perhaps borne its full fruit.

On the 28th February 1908, the anniversary of the relief of Ladysmith, White presided at the Ladysmith dinner. The following is a quotation from his speech :—

Comrades, the next toast I have to afford you the privilege of honouring is the toast of the evening—the old garrison of Ladysmith. That toast is now eight years old, but the events that it recalls have not grown dim in our memories. These years have shown us many changes.

Since last I had the honour to preside at a reunion of this company, I have been a witness of Louis Botha and Dr Jameson standing side by side at the Guildhall listening to the homily of Sir Joseph Dimsdale, the City Chamberlain, on the presentation to each of them of the Freedom of the City of London. As I looked on I felt that any little discourtesy that we, you, and I had thought it our duty to show to the General in denying him the freedom of our little burgh of Ladysmith had been more than compensated for. Nor is this all; so strange a thing is man, especially an Englishman, that a little later on the same festal day, I saw Lord Roberts and the same gallant General sitting side by side in the enjoyment of a mayoral banquet, and I could not help thinking that again in this cycle of change the wheel of fortune had turned towards the Boer, for the civic entertainment was fatter and fuller than the military supply at Ladysmith, even if we include the iron rations contributed by our good neighbour Tom of Bulwana and the plum pudding for which we were indebted to the hospitality of the Boers.

I often look back to those days and turn the searchlight of experience gained there and elsewhere to bear upon the reductions in our Army, and on the insensate cry of further

and still further reductions, that sound like a knell in my ears. I cannot but recall the parliamentary return showing that from the commencement to the end of the South African War, it took 448,000 men to reduce the Boers to the half-hearted submission that they tendered. The whole population of the South African Republics was computed by Mr James Bryce shortly before the war at under 350,000, and that computation included every man, woman, and child. If I might in a sentence ascribe a cause for such a failure to maintain the prestige of the thin red line, I would say "Want of military preparedness." Look, on the other hand, how our Eastern ally and sister island power, Japan, with her 40 millions of population, wrung from the 150 millions of Russia terms which have made her great amongst the nations of the earth, and I would assign the cause to military preparedness, and an intensity of patriotism the like of which the world has not seen since the sun of Sparta's splendour set. . . .

A few days later White wrote out the following paragraphs as part of a speech in behalf of the Veterans' Relief Fund.

There is something especially incumbent on this nation to provide for its old and worn-out soldiers, from its unparalleled extremes of wealth and destitution. Our great Empire has its duties and liabilities as well as its advantages and prestige. Foreign Service to the extent to which we have to employ it, on account of the more remote limbs of this great Empire, must be entrusted to a highly-paid and Volunteer Army. The exile of service in India alone, with its 300 millions of people—one-fifth of the human race—calls for some 75,000 men, with the abnormal waste and loss consequent on its consuming climate. Other nations have no such numerical and distant strain on their manhood. . . .

There is no more self-deceptive and misleading cry than

that which never fails to raise a cheer in a popular assembly in this country,—that England is too free for enforced service, and too advanced in civilisation to be military. . . .

Are we the only free country in the world? Is not our neighbour France free, with its broad-based suffrage and its republican institutions? Yet she arms and equips one in every ten of her population as a soldier, but to fulfil what few would contradict as the first duty of a citizen, the safe-guarding of the State. One quarter, one-fourth of that strain on the manhood of this country, would make the island heart of our Empire absolutely safe, and further, would not only make England invincible, but the arbiter of peace in Western Europe.

Then that other insensate and invertebrate cry, "We must avoid Militarism." "Militarism,"—what does it mean? There is no such word in any dictionary of mine. It is a word invented in English to give verbal form to what does not exist in England. Yet the next word may probably be: "We must rely on the Voluntary principle in England." Can there be two sentiments more radically in opposition the one to the other? Can Voluntary enlistment flourish in a country where the Military instinct is decried and trodden under foot? Yes; but when? When fire and water make common cause.

Then is our boasted Voluntary enlistment Voluntary indeed? I know something of its harvests, for I have lived in close association with its products for over half a century, and I tell you that in five-tenths of cases it is enlistment under the most cruel form of compulsion, the compulsion of destitution or of trouble, and the tyranny of an empty belly.

But it is time for me to stop, and you may say to me, What application has all this to the Veterans' Relief Fund? As long as you employ in a large proportion your paupers to fight your battles, so long are you bound by every law of God and man to save them from the workhouse when under the inexorable decree of time they are too old and too weak to

fight for you, or to work for their own maintenance and that of their children.

The 'Times' of March 7, 1908, had the following account of another speech of White's delivered at this time:—

SIR GEORGE WHITE ON MILITARY PREPAREDNESS.

Field-Marshal Sir George White, on Saturday evening, addressed a large meeting of the Students' Association for North London, at the Islington Central Library, Holloway Road, on "Military Service and National Preparedness." Sir John Runtz occupied the chair.

At the outset Sir George said that he did not address the gathering as a professional lecturer or as a practised public speaker, but as a soldier. He had no private axe to grind, no political end to serve, his sole concern being for the safety of the country. He had great confidence in the sound common-sense of the country, but he did not believe that this question had ever been fairly and fully put before the public. Broadly, there were two schools of thought among those who opposed the extension of military service or training. The first was composed of people who regarded all war as sin. They must remember, however, that sooner or later, if we were to maintain our position among the nations, war, with its attendant horrors, must come upon us, and the surest way to bring on those horrors was to veto all preparation for it, or to fend it off. Universal peace was a dream; war was the experience of men. This school of thought suggested arbitration as the panacea. In judging arbitration they must look at the results of the recent Peace Conferences at the Hague. Would, he asked, Germany submit her vital interests to arbitration? She would not, and he was glad of it, for he should regard a great nation as being in its decadence if it submitted its interests to the dictates of others, instead of standing up for itself. The second school of thought was composed of those

who said that as we were an island kingdom we must have a fleet of overwhelming strength. The fleet was intended to protect our coasts and our commerce, and to keep open the lines of communication between the Mother Country and the outlying limbs of the Empire. It was argued, however, that the Navy was strong enough to resist invasion and do this work as well. He differed from Mr Balfour when he said that only a raid was possible, that invasion was impossible; and he quoted historical incidents to show that the Navy alone could not effect the "conquest of peace." What were our land forces compared with those of Continental nations? So far as England was concerned, the chairman had told them that the Army was short of 8000 officers. That was a startling figure; and Sir George added, amid laughter, "Fools as we British officers are, you can't make us in a minute."

Sir George White, in replying to the vote of thanks, incautiously went too close to the edge of the dais, and fell to the floor below. Before, however, any of the audience could reach him, Sir George was on his feet again, and, apparently quite undisturbed, he took his stand on the platform, adding, "I could not possibly give you a better example of how unexpectedly danger may come upon us."

Sir George afterwards said that he was not in the least hurt by the unexpected accident.

White writes upon this to his brother:—

Did you see the account in the 'Times' of Tuesday (Monday perhaps) of my fall off the platform at Islington on Saturday night? I had talked to a crammed audience in a big hall for an hour with marked success, and sat down very well satisfied. In rising to return thanks I turned to address the seconder of the vote of thanks, who was amongst the audience, when I got my foot over the edge of the platform and had a regular fall. I think the audience thought I had had a fit, but I was absolutely unhurt, and was up again on my legs in

20 seconds, and improved the occasion by saying, "I could not have given you a more striking example of the need of preparedness, as unsuspected danger may lurk at your very elbow." This was greeted with wild applause.

In June of this year, 1908, White was informed by Mr Haldane, then Secretary for War, that there was to be an important ceremony at Quebec in honour of Generals Wolfe and Montcalm, and that he had been selected by the King to represent the British Army on the occasion; Lord Roberts, the Senior Field-Marshal, being unable for private reasons to undertake the duty. White at once expressed his willingness to go; but immediately afterwards received a letter from Lord Roberts saying that he was now no longer prevented from carrying out the original arrangement. On this White withdrew his acceptance as readily as he had given it, "and undoubtedly," he wrote to his brother, "it will be a far greater compliment to Canada to send Bobs."

But though he did not go to Canada, White was nominated to represent the King at the memorial service to General Wolfe which was held in London about the same time.

Among White's drafts and notes upon military questions written during the last years of his life, there is one—a paper of pencil notes upon Mr Haldane's scheme of military organisation—which may be worth quoting here. It shows that White was wrong in his estimate of the probable duration of a war in Europe under present conditions; but in this and

other respects the paper is interesting. The following are extracts:—

> How can preparedness, which Mr Haldane says is the essence of what he aims at, be reconciled with the caprice of the country to accept service or the popularity of the war? Under such a system there can be no preparedness, because the first principle of preparedness is to base your detailed preparation on accurate numbers.
>
> I think on the whole the scheme is in theory an advance. If it succeeds in practice it will give us a larger striking force than we now possess, and a more homogeneous territorial army. Both, however, are ridiculously out of proportion to the immense accession of strength that all other military nations have gained by their reorganisations. If our most sanguine estimates are realised we shall only have one man to every twelve that Germany can put in the field at once, and one man to every eight that France can put in the field. . . .
>
> As leading up to compulsory service, by reducing the only alternative principle to a *reductio ad absurdum*, I think the scheme a highly ingenious if somewhat complicated one.
>
> With regard to the territorial army, a scheme of six months' training on the declaration of war puts it out of the field of operations. The war will be over before the territorial army will be fit to take part in it. When the whole manhood of a nation is thrown into action at twelve hours' notice the duration of the war must be very short.

This has no doubt proved to be a mistake; but it seemed last autumn as if France was in fact on the point of being stricken down within a few weeks of the declaration of war. And the territorial army of Great Britain was unfit to enter the field. The

wonderful tenacity of the French, and of our small regular army, saved us from the full consequences of our unreadiness, but it was a narrow escape.

At the close of this year, 1908, White was consulted regarding a proposed scheme for forming and maintaining in England a reserve of food. His answer, written on 1st January 1909, was as follows:—

> England has only a Navy—she has no Army—a Navy never can end a war. We of all people, with such risks staring us in the face, must endeavour to shorten our next war. We are still groaning under the taxation for the debt incurred in Napoleon's wars. I would like to see a reserve of bread-stuff. But believe (me?) our first need is an Army with which to purchase alliances and have some means of enforcing peace on reasonable terms.

A few weeks later White was at Mentone, and had started again upon his beloved mountain walks. These he undoubtedly overdid, for he writes of long tramps and climbs lasting sometimes ten hours or more, occasionally in cold and snow. For a man of nearly seventy-four such expeditions were imprudent, to say the least of it; but he would not believe that they could do him anything but good; and this year they certainly seemed to do him no harm.

In May, after a short visit to Gibraltar, he was once more at home in Chelsea. Then followed visits to Edinburgh and Glasgow, where he delivered speeches on Temperance and on his favourite subject of National Defence, and later a visit to the West of England. At Falmouth, on the 3rd of August, he

spoke again on this subject, and the following is the text of his speech as given by the 'Western Morning News':—

Sir George White, who had an enthusiastic reception, said he was in full accord with what had been read and said by the Mayor, that it was above all things necessary that the great question of national defence should be kept out of political issues. Believing as he did that our military resources were in no sense adequate to the calls that might at any time be made upon them, he would like to invite the separate judgment of every man and woman present on the merits of the case itself, and wholly apart from political issues. His reason for laying such stress on that was that if once it got into the whirlpool of politics all hope was lost of that question, so vital to the future of our great empire, because it got engulfed in that maelstrom of, he might say, factious partisanship. Britons of late years had had very little experience, he was glad to think, of any but those more distant and lesser wars. They had never even had a serious threat of a war that affected more closely our home interests. We had therefore, he thought, been lulling ourselves of late years into what he believed to be a feeling of false security, instead of keeping our eyes, and all our other senses too, riveted on changes which had been taking place with ever-increasing rapidity among the Continental nations which were our nearest neighbours, and which had resulted in enormous increases to their forces. We emerged from the last great European war certainly as victors, but at the same time in gaining that great victory, which had been of such enormous advantage to us in the past, we were joined with nearly all the other nations of Europe against the one common foe, Napoleon. What had become of those alliances now? It was not inapposite of him to draw a distinction between ententes and alliances which we had got and which we had not got. Ententes might be described as agreements in force only in time of peace, and then more with

regard to social and, perhaps, commercial matters. Alliances, on the contrary, never bore full fruit until they came to the real ordeal of war or a serious threat of war. We had a very striking example of alliances in the fact that the greatest military Power in Europe, which would suggest itself to all of them, had not thought it above her utmost endeavours to cement such alliances with other Powers, so that at this present moment there was an alliance which meant that the allied Powers would stand shoulder to shoulder in the final ordeal of war, and that alliance or alliances stretched from the Mediterranean to the North Sea.

He was not inclined to make too little of the difficulties of organising our military defences. He believed that the necessities of the time demanded a change. It appeared to him something like national self-destruction to turn away from the consideration of what was really needed because of the difficulties in the way, or because of the horrors of war. Nobody hated war more than an old soldier. Some people looked upon war as criminal, and upon all who participated in war as sharing in a great crime. People who conscientiously held that opinion were entitled to the respect which was given to all conscientious opinions in this liberal and tolerant country. But if war was a crime, the surest way to bring it about was to neglect all preparation to guard against it. Consider the nature of war. Tennyson rightly said war was "the consequence of those passions which make earth hell"—ambition, jealousy, pride, greed, and suchlike. These passions had been in play from the time when Cain killed Abel, and could they come to the conclusion that the play of those passions was yet dead, or that our statesmen would be justified in making no provision against the consequences such passions brought about? To be consistent, people who objected to the army ought also to object to the police. Armies were really the police force of nations, to preserve national property and rights, and they should be adequate to carrying out that high purpose. In fact, all

history taught us that universal peace, though a beautiful ideal, was the dream of the visionary; and war, "red in tooth and claw," was part of the experience of mankind, and would continue to be so as long as the passions he had named had their part in this wicked world. The strongest deterrent to war was the fear of defeat. War was the balancing of risks against results. The greater the risk and the smaller the prize, the less the probability of war; and the less the risks and the greater the prize, the greater the probability of war. Now, apply that to our own position in the world. We had voluntarily taken upon ourselves the protection and championship of 400 millions of people who lived under the British flag — one quarter of the human race. We possessed the most advantageous parts of the earth; but there were other nations besides ourselves who were expanding and increasing. Germany was increasing in population more rapidly than we were. Her average increase was 800,000 or a million a year; our increase was only 300,000 a year. This expansion, by the inexorable laws of Nature, resulted in a struggle for existence, and in that struggle for existence the fittest survived, which in the case of nations meant the strongest and the best prepared.

He did not ignore the advantages of our insular position, but with the advent of airships every one must feel that England was no longer entirely an island. He quite felt the force of the contention that England as an island empire required a fleet of the very greatest power, but he differed when they went on to say that we only required a very small army, and that principally to garrison our great dependencies. He yielded to no man in his intense admiration for the sister service. He believed sincerely that what men and ships could do that our navy would accomplish. He was bound to the navy not only by ties of great admiration; he was also linked to them with links of steel, by gratitude for the assistance they had given him in three separate campaigns. Had it not been for the scientific knowledge, the readiness, the zeal, and

promptitude of our naval officers, he should not have had a gun with which he could reply in Ladysmith to the Boers. In considering a question of such vital importance to the future of our beloved country, it was absolutely necessary that we should exhaust every side of the question; and there still remained the question, Could a nation, even an island nation, wage a successful war with the navy alone, and without an adequate army at home? (A Voice: "No.") He was delighted with that answer from the body of the house, because he was in the fullest accord with it. He had studied this question for a long time, and had read every book worth reading in the English language upon it, and the conclusion he had arrived at made it incumbent on him to give the reasons which had forced him to conclusions which he would gladly have avoided. He was sure England would only wage war when all other methods of settling differences had failed, and that even then her object in waging war would be to conquer peace.

Sir George White went on to say that Nelson was wrong in saying it would lead to lasting peace. Trafalgar was fought in 1805, and there was no lasting peace until ten years later—ten years of most terrible bloodshed and most extravagant expenditure in Europe, and then it was won in the battle of Waterloo, a land victory. He thoroughly believed that in the days of Napoleon we had more men trained and under arms than at the present day. At that time the population of the British Isles was between 15 and 17 millions, and their revenue something under 40 millions. Our population to-day was about 44 millions, and our revenue over 150 millions. He left it to them to judge whether in proportion we were making the sacrifice which a great nation ought to make to maintain the position which undoubtedly we must hold in Europe, if we were to take the place it had been our pride to take ever since the wars of Napoleon. In Napoleon's time the population of our empire was somewhere about 27 millions. The numbers for whom we were responsible in our empire to-day was 400 millions. Our military

organisation always struck him personally as still more inadequate when he considered it with regard to the abnormal system under which we fed ourselves. In the days of Napoleon we raised nearly all the bread-stuffs we required. He believed we required 900,000 quarters to make complete the bread rations of the nation. We now raised much less bread-stuffs in our own fields, and we required to import 27 million quarters to feed our people. To put it in another way—we were dependent on the navy to keep open absolutely our great highway of the sea to feed from day to day three-quarters of the population of our islands.

The essence of all modern military organisation was the preparedness in the nations by which we were surrounded. That preparedness had been carried to an extraordinary degree under a system which could be accurately described as nations in arms. The whole of the manhood of those nations was armed, trained, and equipped for service and ready to rejoin their standards at a few hours' notice. In addition to that, the enormously increased means of transport which modern times afforded had been thought out and prepared beforehand to throw the whole manhood of those nations in whatever direction the purposes of the campaign they were about to wage dictated to them. It therefore followed, that the earliest blows in the campaigns of the future would be struck by such overwhelming numbers and with such extraordinary rapidity that there would be very little chance of the decisive blows thus administered being ever recovered from, or of developing latent resources, that lifebuoy which had so often kept England afloat when nearly engulfed in a sea of unpreparedness.

In order that our navy may pursue what was its legitimate avocation—search out enemies and their fleets, and guard the lines of commerce on which we were dependent for daily bread—it was absolutely essential that the sons of our soil should stand armed, trained, and equipped, ready to form in adequate numbers, and with sufficient training, a second line

to our great navy; and in case the wave of invasion should ever dare to roll over our beautiful coasts, they should be from their training, numbers, and equipment, ready to hurl it back into the sea from which it came. What appeared to him to be the risk in neglecting that was that our military impotence should react upon the efficiency of our navy, chaining its ships close to our coasts—and no Government in case of the threat of invasion at present dare let them go anywhere else,—chaining them in a condition of passive defence of our shores, and parting from the great naval strategy of past times, which had given to old England the right to claim that she was mistress of every sea.

In conclusion, Sir George put before them the parallel of our brave ally, Japan, who was not content to guard her island kingdom by a strong fleet sailing round the vitals of her island home. She had for a long time trained her people in patriotism to a degree which had not been equalled in the history of the world. She armed, trained, and equipped in anticipation of the event of war the manhood of her country, and she wrung terms which had put her among the greatest nations of the earth from her proud and too-confident antagonist in land fighting with land forces on the mountains of Manchuria. He did not think he was going beyond the actual probabilities if he said that if her system of defence had been confined to a navy alone and an inadequate army, the Russian legions, confining themselves to land, would now probably be in possession of the toe and heel of Corea, and threatening the very vitals of that most gallant little island-empire. "Our Corea," concluded Sir George, "is the coasts of Holland, of Belgium, and a part of the North-West of France."

It will be seen that in this speech, as in others, White put forward no definite scheme of organisation. He had written to Mr Goldman, now member for Falmouth, "I would rather not be bound by

National Service League principles." Apparently he favoured general military training throughout the nation, but he did not say so in precise words. In a later speech, delivered at Plymouth, of which there is no record among his papers, he was, if I remember right, equally independent of specific schemes. It was the last time I saw him. He looked well and spoke strongly, and had a good reception; but I do not think his speech made much impression on the people of Plymouth. Although there were many old soldiers and sailors among them, there was also a considerable "anti-militarist" element, and being then, with Mr Waldorf Astor, a candidate for the Borough, I was warned that our attendance on this occasion might lose us "hundreds of votes." Perhaps it did.

I may add that shortly before the election of January 1910, wishing to have the help of my old chief Lord Roberts, who was ready to come down and speak, I found that his coming was regarded as likely to do harm to the Unionist cause rather than good. He had suspected this himself, and asked me to ascertain. It was a striking, and to me a surprising example of the blindness of the country to the position in which it then stood, and of its determination not to listen to any warnings on the subject. Lord Roberts had sent me, for distribution, some copies of Blatchford's well-known pamphlet on the German menace. But to most people at that time the patriotic and clear-sighted Socialist was, like the veteran commander, merely "an alarmist."

Early in 1910 White was once more at Mentone, and immediately began his mountain walks again. At last he was obliged to recognise that he was not as fit for them as he had been, for he writes to his brother after his first attempt, which had involved a climb of more than 2000 feet above Mentone, that he had come back tired out.

> I was quite done, and think the more or less chronic bronchitis I suffer from has affected my wind, or is it 3 score and 15 years? If I don't improve I will give it up altogether.

Unluckily he did not give it up altogether, and other letters speak of "mountain expeditions, which mean starting immediately after breakfast and not getting back till 5 or 6 P.M., tired and indisposed to work." With these accounts of mountain expeditions are mingled more or less humorous complaints of the "regular social treadmill," of "luncheon engagements which break up the whole day," and other tiresome doings of the kind. But there were some pleasant and interesting people on the Riviera at this time, and White did not find the "regular social treadmill" altogether disagreeable. His diary for 1910 mentions his former colleague Sir Henry Brackenbury; Lord Wolseley; Park, now a Major-General, who had commanded the Devons at Ladysmith; his old friend Miss Warrender, Mr and Mrs Symons Jeune and their daughter, and several others. Then, on the 9th of March, comes an entry which records that early in the morning of that day White woke up with a sudden heart attack which very nearly proved fatal.

After a couple of hours very doubtful struggle with the grim old man with the scythe, came round . . . ordered to keep absolutely still and in bed for ten days.

This was the end of his mountain walks. The doctors who attended him thought that the heart trouble was connected with an old injury to the veins of his broken leg; but however this may have been, he was obliged for the future to lead a somewhat less strenuous life. Not that he allowed himself to become a chronic invalid. Returning to Chelsea he went through the London season with its various duties, attending Committee Meetings of the National Service League, of the Church Lads' Brigade, and of other societies in which he was interested. He also attended public dinners and ceremonials, though less frequently than before. Even after a second heart attack, which occurred in the end of August, he declined to give up his active habits. An entry in his diary of the 1st September, "Shoot partridges with W. Samson at Penn Beaconsfield," is probably the record of an engagement rather than of an actual occurrence,[1] and his diary for September and October is practically blank. But on the 1st November comes the entry: "Shot at Denton Court . . . shot fairly well. Bag in two days over 700 pheasants," and during the rest of the year are several more entries about shooting. Indeed, the diary contains little else. Finally, still in his diary for 1910, but dated 1911, 5th (January), is the last entry he ever made: "To Braxted Park, Witham,

[1] He had enjoyed many good days with the same host before.

Essex, to shoot Friday the 6th & Saturday 7th. Train leaves Liverpool St. 4.18 P.M." The entry is in his usual firm hand, showing no sign of age. But, though he went to Braxted Park, his shooting days were over. On the following morning he came down to breakfast, but was evidently unwell, and shortly afterwards he found himself obliged to give up the day's sport and return to Chelsea. Once at home he broke down completely. The illness which followed, though not immediately fatal, was the beginning of the end. His powerful vitality enabled him to keep up for some time his fight against "the grim old man with the scythe"; but it was a hopeless fight; he had received his death-blow.

CHAPTER XXI.

LAST DAYS.

1911–1912.

THERE is no need to linger upon the last year of George White's life.

His health had failed, and in the general breakdown he had been attacked by some form of that mysterious malady aphasia, which has been defined as the loss of the faculty of interchanging thought without any affection of the intellect or will. Both in speaking and in writing he now found it difficult to express himself correctly. But even this blow, a dreadful one to any man, could not break his courage; never perhaps had it risen higher.

Thoroughly realising the nature of the trouble which had come upon him, he resolved, in spite of his seventy-five years, that he would overcome it; and by hard daily work, such as he might have given to mastering a foreign language, he succeeded to a great extent in reconquering his lost powers. Meanwhile, it is said, the dejection and irritability

usual in such cases gained no hold upon him; "his patience and consideration for others were greater than ever."

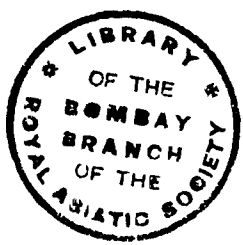
During his illness he had not been deserted by his old friends. Lord Roberts, Sir John Dunne, Ian Hamilton, Charles Crosthwaite, and others came to see him at intervals, and he greatly enjoyed their visits.

In the spring of 1912, after spending some months at Haslemere in a house lent to him by another friend, Miss Hozier, White returned to Chelsea, and received a warm welcome from the old soldiers and staff of the Royal Hospital. But though he was glad to be at home again, and seemed in much better health and spirits, the end was not long delayed. The 29th of May, Founder's Day, is always celebrated at Chelsea by a full-dress parade of the pensioners in the Hospital square, facing the statue of Charles the Second, which is wreathed with oak leaves to commemorate his escape from his pursuers at Boscobel. That year the King and Queen announced their intention to be present at the ceremony, but soon afterwards White caught a chill at a flower-show in the Hospital grounds, and became seriously ill. The King had already sent word that he would not expect to see White on parade, and would instead pay him a visit in his own house. When the day came White knew nothing of the ceremony outside, or of the visit of the King and Queen, who had both come in person to express to his wife their sympathy in

her trouble. It had then for the first time been realised that his life was in danger. On the 24th of June he died.

His body was borne to its resting-place amid the mourning of the nation. Seldom has a more stately funeral been seen in England. He was followed to his grave by a great concourse of his fellow-soldiers, and all classes of his countrymen joined in the gathering.

The English people did well to show their respect and affection for his memory. It had not fallen to his lot to command great armies in the field and gain resplendent victories; but in many campaigns he had shown himself a brave and capable leader of men; and at one dark hour in the national history, when much was at stake, he had steadfastly upheld the honour of his country. In defeat he had taken upon himself the blame; in success he had been modest and generous. What he said of others may fitly be said of him. The Empire has not often produced a more chivalrous soldier, a truer patriot, or a more single-minded gentleman.



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